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ABSTRACT

This document consists of an overview and five papers examining the findings of a comparative analysis of literacy practices in urban and rural Australian communities. The study included case studies of 23 families in 6 communities and documentation of the literacy practices within the 9 schools attended by the children of those families. Presented first is an overview of the methods and results of the case studies, which were conducted to identify the following: similarities/differences in literacy practices between urban and rural communities; possible influences of variations in language background and social class on literacy practices; and similarities/differences in literacy practices between home and school. The following papers, which are all based on information gathered during the case studies, constitute the remainder of the document: "Doing Case Studies" (Mari Rhydwen); "Literacy Practices in Urban and Rural Communities" (Judith Rivalland); "Language Diversity and Literacy Practices" (Caroline Barratt-Pugh); "Social Class and Family Literacy Practices" (William Louden); and "Home and School Literacy Practices" (Mary Rohl). Each paper contains references. (MN)

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ED 399 425

LITERACY IN ITS PLACE

LITERACY PRACTICES IN URBAN AND RURAL COMMUNITIES
OVERVIEW AND INTERPRETATIONS

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Language & Literacy

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LITERACY IN ITS PLACE

An Investigation of Literacy Practices in Urban and Rural Communities

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May 1994

Overview & Interpretations

Australian Language & Literacy Policy
National Child Literacy Project 2 1993-94

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We are especially grateful to Alison Hill for her efficiency and patience in the complicated and unenviable task of collating all the various parts of this Report and her invaluable contribution to its editing and final production.

The inevitably selective understanding of life in the families and schools which is expressed in this Report is due to the narrowness of our research focus. Parents and teachers kindly gave permission for us to publicise the case studies having read them, but our interpretations and deductions from these studies are not necessarily shared by them. Nor do views expressed in this Report necessarily represent the views of the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training.

A Guide To The Reader

This report provides a descriptive account of literacy practices in urban and rural communities as represented by twenty-three families in six communities. In addition to exemplifying and range of literacy practices typical of the families studied, the report also documents literacy practices within the nine schools which were attended by the children of the families.

The primary aim of the research project has been to uncover, through a case study investigation, the similarities and differences in literacy practices between urban and rural communities. In selecting communities, we also aimed to work with families who represented, as far as possible, the linguistic, cultural, and social diversity of Australia. We became particularly interested in the possible impact of the language background and socio-economic status of families upon their children's use and development of literacy. We also aimed to compare home and school literacy practices.

Therefore, in this report, we offer detailed **interpretations** of five major issues that emerged from the research. The issues we focus upon are:

- the process of undertaking case study research within the communities;
- similarities and differences in literacy practices between urban and rural communities;
- the possible influences of variations in language background upon literacy practices;
- the possible influences of variations in social class upon literacy practices;
- similarities and differences in literacy practices between the home and the school.

These interpretive accounts are preceded by an **Overview** of our main findings from the case study investigations. The Overview also offers a number of key implications which we have deduced from the research.

The data obtained from the families, schools, and communities are written up as case studies. The case studies are grouped in **a second volume** according to the six communities in which the research was undertaken. Each study documents the literacy practices of a number of families within that community and gives a brief account of language and literacy work in the school as experienced by at least two of the children from each family. The studies also provide an overview of the literacy resources available in school and community and give an indication of how these are used by the families.

The case studies therefore provide particular accounts of the core data obtained during the research project. They are self-standing in the sense that they can be read as specific research reports on literacy practices within particular communities.

The two volumes reporting this study are therefore sequenced from our more general deductions, through our interpretations of key issues arising from the case studies, to the detailed case studies themselves. The reader may, of course, choose to reverse this sequence, moving from the particulars of literacy practices as captured by the case studies to the overview of what we have learned from all of the cases. Should you require the volume devoted to **The Case Studies**, please request a copy from: *Maureen Mankoo, Edith Cowan University, Pearson Street, Churchlands, Western Australia 6018.*

We have adopted two conventions throughout this report. First, we have given pseudonyms to all communities, schools, families, and family members. Second, when quoting the actual words of one of our informants within our own text, what has been said is indicated in italics.

CHAPTER 1
OVERVIEW

This study is a descriptive investigation of home and school literacy practices in a variety of urban and rural communities. The study was shaped by the requirements of the Australian Languages and Literacy Policy project brief. The primary aim was to undertake a number of case studies to discover the similarities and differences in literacy practices between urban and rural communities. These case studies were expected to be as representative as possible of different kinds of community, family background and culture, as well as socio-economic status, homelessness and unemployment. Other aims of the project were to identify influences on children's literacy that occur outside school, identify the extent to which children in the different communities seek out sources of literacy, and to consider the influence on children's literacy of educational resources available in schools used by the community and the associated educational practices.

In the Australian Languages and Literacy Policy, literacy is defined as:

> the ability to read and use information and to write appropriately in a range of contexts. It is used to develop knowledge and understanding, to achieve personal growth and to function effectively in our society. Literacy also includes the recognition of numbers and basic mathematical signs and symbols within texts. Literacy involves the integration of speaking, listening and critical thinking with reading and writing.

We began our study from the premise that literacy, defined in this way, is demonstrated in the home and school practices that occur around written, spoken, visual, dramatic and media texts. Literacy is a social practice. We learn to 'do' literacy as we learn how to behave in our families and communities. For this reason, our data collection focused upon an array of social practices which were both constructed by and constructive of the use of language within the domains of home and school.

What We Set Out to Do

Our primary aim throughout this study has been to provide a descriptive account of literacy practices which would enable an exploration of similarities and differences in these practices across communities. We therefore set out to collect data on home and school literacy in a good range of Western Australian communities and families. By the end of the study we had prepared case studies of twenty-three families in six communities and nine schools. In each family, we collected data through a cycle of interviews and observations conducted over several months. The interview and

observation data collected by the researchers was supplemented by audio tapes of literacy practices collected by the 10-13 year old children in each family, or by other family members. School literacy data were collected by observations and audio-tapes of classroom activities of one or two of the children in each family. During the empirical research and at the conclusion of the data collection phase of the study, the relevant sections of each case were returned to participants to be checked for errors of fact or interpretation. These case studies appear as Volume 2 of this report. The final set of case study families appears in Table 1, classified by location, school-type, language background, and school and family names.

Table 1: The Case Study Communities

Location	School-type	Language	School	Family
Urban	Non-DSP	ESB	Windsor Park	Smith West O'Leary
		NESB	Windsor Park	Ling Wong Barnes
	DSP	ESB	Redlands	Long Bauman
			Radcliffe	Carroll Scott/Clay/Bailey
		NESB	Radcliffe	Kuhn Kha
Rural	Non-DSP	ESB	Highglen	Caravaggio Hooper
		NESB	Highglen	Manders-Gunn Jackson
	DSP	ESB	Countrytown	Hendricksen Kelly
		NESB	Countrytown	George
			St Andrews	Milardovic
Remote	PCAP	ESB	Yabby Creek	Johnson Waugh
		NESB	Blue Creek	Binayi

The starting point for our case studies of family literacy practices was a set of differences based on community location: whether the families lived in urban or rural environments. For this reason, we chose to structure the selection of case study families to represent the range of urban, rural and remote locations in Western Australia. Half of the participating families were to be recruited in the Perth metropolitan area and the other half were to be recruited from a medium-sized country town, a smaller farming community on the margin of the arable agricultural area, and a remote community with a majority population of Aboriginal people. As we began planning to recruit families to represent the range of geographical community contexts, we bore in mind some of the other sets of differences that seem to distinguish families. In particular, we focussed on differences related to family language background and our expectations about social class.

As the Table indicates, families were identified as having an English speaking background (ESB) or non-English speaking background (NESB), according to information provided to us by participating schools. The schools in the study are classified as either DSP/PCAP or non-DSP, depending on whether the school received additional Commonwealth funding in 1993 through the Commonwealth government's Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP) or Priority Country Areas Program (PCAP). As this Overview goes on to say, these sociological categories were used to recruit families, but were regarded as problematic from the first days of the study.

Creating the Case Studies

The background material provided in the project brief refers to a number of studies on the relationship between culture and education including Shirley Brice Heath's *Ways with Words* (1983) and John Ogbu's *The Next Generation* (1974). These ethnographies were based on extensive field research conducted over years by individual participant observers. Our case studies are not ethnographic case studies. They are based on interviews, audio-tapes collected by families and observations in school classrooms. The cases were written by a team of seven researchers, each of whom spent months rather than years in their field work. Only two of the researchers worked full-time, and this involvement was limited to the data collection phase. The total elapsed time for the field work, including the feedback of written cases to our informants for their recommendations, was less than seven months.

Two important consequences flowed from the time frame and the resultant need to use a team of investigators. The relatively short time frame precluded the depth of data which might be expected from anthropological case studies. On the other hand, the combined efforts of a team of researchers allowed us to document a broad range of families and communities. At the least, these case studies revealed a richness and complexity not normally captured by large scale surveys. This became immediately apparent as the team, in the early stages of contact with families, found that our initial selection criteria were not sufficiently delicate in characterising the groups of people with whom we would be working. Whilst this could have been a source of frustration, it was

reassuring to be reminded that families do not, in fact, fit neatly into categories such as 'low socio-economic status' or 'non English-speaking background' constructed by conventional social theory.

The second consequence of using a team of researchers was that multiple perspectives were brought to the data. The backgrounds of our team included a methodological range from psychometrics to ethnography, and a disciplinary range which included applied linguistics, educational psychology, literacy development and curriculum studies. As these researchers worked on their separate case studies, their intellectual differences were played out in the ways they interpreted school and familial experiences and in the ways chose to represent the data. A more detailed account of the methodological issues which we confronted in the study may be found in Chapter 2 of this report.

The Case Study Communities

The proposed outline of this study called for twelve urban and twelve rural families. Six community locations were selected: three in the Perth metropolitan area and three in the country. In addition, we planned to represent a variety of language backgrounds and social class conditions through these communities:

- Windsor Park Primary School, like many other schools in Australia's sprawling suburbs, serves a recently established and economically advantaged community. Twenty years ago, the land was a pine plantation on the edge of the metropolitan area; now, it is occupied by several thousand families living in single dwellings with a median value of almost double the median price of all Perth homes. Forty percent of the school population comes from non-English speaking backgrounds, many of them first generation immigrants from Asia.

- Redlands and Radcliffe Primary Schools are suburban schools which draw funds from the Disadvantaged Schools Program. Both schools serve neighbourhoods which include some privately owned single dwellings, many single dwellings rented from the state housing authority, and a sprinkling of multi-story apartment blocks provided by the state housing authority for low income earners. Both schools include substantial minorities of students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

- Countrytown is a community of less than 5,000 persons in a wheat and sheep farming area in the South-West corner of Australia. Countrytown has two government primary schools - Countrytown and Highglen - and a small Catholic primary school. In 1993, when we collected the data, one of the two government schools was classified as Disadvantaged. Countrytown Primary, which has received additional funding from the Disadvantaged Schools Program for many years, is the older of the two government schools. The second government school, Highglen Primary, was not funded through the

Disadvantaged Schools Program. Situated in an area known locally as *Nobs Hill*, which includes some affluent private housing as well as some publicly provided housing mainly occupied by Aboriginal people, Highglen was locally regarded as the higher status government school. About ten percent of the students in both Countrytown Primary and Highglen come from a Malay background. Twenty five percent of the children at Countrytown identify as Aboriginal; fewer than eight percent of the students at Highglen identify as Aboriginal. Four families were drawn from Highglen Primary. One family was drawn from St Andrews, the Catholic primary school. A third of the children at St Andrews were from farming families; none of the children were from Aboriginal or Malay backgrounds.

- In addition to the Countrytown families, we also sought to work with two families from each of two very small rural communities. When plans to approach two families through the school in a remote Aboriginal community failed, we used existing personal contacts to approach a family in Blue Creek, a community of five extended families who live close to one of the service towns in the East Kimberley region in the remote North-West corner of Australia. The children from this family, attended a school which received additional funding through the Priority Country Areas Program.

- The final two families were approached through the primary school at Yabby Creek, a small town of about 120 persons on the edge of farming land sixty kilometres inland from Countrytown. By virtue of its isolation, the Yabby Creek school qualifies for additional disadvantaged school funding through the Priority Country Areas Program. In view of the small size and homogeneity of the school and community, however, we did not attempt to select the Yabby Creek families according to perceived social class differences in the community.

Across the whole study, therefore, we worked with six city families whose children were enrolled in Disadvantaged Schools Program schools and six city families whose children were not enrolled in Disadvantaged Schools Program schools. Of the eleven rural families, we worked with three rural families whose children were enrolled in a Disadvantaged Schools Program school, three families whose children were enrolled in a school disadvantaged by isolation, one family whose children were enrolled in a private school with relatively few children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and four families whose children were enrolled in a school not funded by the Disadvantaged Schools Program.

Through our involvement with these twenty-three families, we were able to explore the range of similarities and differences between (i) urban and rural families, (ii) families with a range of language backgrounds, (iii) middle class and working class families, and between (iv) home and school literacy practices. This Overview provides a summary account of each of these issues. More complete interpretations of the case study data in relation to each issue are offered in chapters 3-6 in Volume 1 of this report.

Urban and Rural Families

International comparisons of student performance in reading and writing have suggested that students in rural areas achieve lower scores than students in urban areas (Garden & Livingstone, 1989; Elley, 1992). These differences, which are more pronounced in less-developed countries, have been explained in terms of differences in resources, teacher qualifications and cultural amenities (Elley, 1992, p. 63). These differences in school performance may exist in Australia but the current evidence is ambiguous. Despite raw score significant differences, a recent study of the urban, rural and remote location effects on student performance in reading and writing has concluded that the effect due to location is slight. For writing in Years 3 and 7, students in rural schools outperformed students in both metropolitan and remote schools. In Year 10 this trend was reversed with metropolitan students performing better than rural and remote students. For reading, there were no significant differences between the performances of students in each of the three school locations (Western Australia, 1993a).

Our case studies of home and school literacy practices are equally ambiguous. Although we found some evidence of more limited resources in rural and remote schools, there were few urban/rural differences in either home or school literacy practices. In fact, as the following five pairs of families suggest, there were many similarities which could be observed in both rural and urban settings.

Similarities: Five pairs of Families

Despite their differences, these is a striking set of similarities in the literacy practices and aspirations of the urban Ling family and the rural Jackson family. Susan and Azmi Jackson in Countrytown are a Malay family who grew up and were educated on Cocos Island. The family speak Malay at home, although both parents speak English well. Susan worked as a dental nurse on Cocos, but now works as a night cleaner in order to make sure one parent is always home with the children. Azmi is a slaughterman. The Jackson children learn to read the Qur'an and attend other religious classes after school and on the weekend. The children and their father are tri-literate in English, Malay and Arabic and bi-lingual in English and Malay. The Jackson children are all encouraged to read and use books for their projects. Azmi reads the newspapers and Susan reads the papers and magazines. Apart from homework and Malay school there is not much writing done in the home. The children have a video computer game and watch television when there is something interesting to watch. Susan helps with the children's homework, although she said that some of the maths is too difficult for her. The children are expected to complete high school and move on to university. The parents want to ensure their children will learn English, although they value their own cultural heritage and notice the differences between their own childhoods and that of their children.

Mr and Mrs Ling in Windsor Park are a Chinese family who grew up on Christmas Island. Although all the children were brought up speaking Cantonese, they now

prefer to speak English even to their parents. Both Mr and Mrs Ling completed Year 10 on Christmas Island, Mrs Ling completed a secretarial course and Mr Ling completed an apprenticeship. The reading practices of the Lings are similar to those of the Jacksons. They read the newspaper and magazines, while encouraging their children to read and exchange books. Mrs Ling supervises homework and assists the children with reading. Television is watched when the children are interested, although this is vetted to ensure programs are not violent. Like the Jacksons, religious practices play an important role in the family social and literacy practices. Mrs Ling reads the *Bible* regularly and the children attend Bible study and church weekly. The children have attended Mandarin classes organised by the Chung Wah Association. Mr and Mrs Ling are anxious to ensure that their children get some qualifications. They feel their children are quite ambitious and are likely to gain professional qualifications. Like the Jacksons, the Lings want to see their children overcome the lack of opportunity suffered by their parents as an outcome of not attaining tertiary qualifications. They encourage their children to speak English fluently, but like the Jacksons feel concerned about the maintenance of their own culture.

In the second pair of families, the rural Hoopers and the urban Smiths, the families live in different circumstances but they share some similar literacy practices. Barbara and Graham Smith attended British grammar schools, both have university degrees, and they now reside in an exclusive Perth suburb. Graham works as an engineer and Barbara is engaged in home duties. Linda and Bruce Hooper live on a 7,000 acre property about 30 kilometres from Countrytown. Bruce left school after four years of high school. Linda attended school in Perth and afterwards completed a short training course run by the Pharmacy Guild and went to Countrytown to help make up prescriptions. She married Bruce and has been in Countrytown ever since.

Literacy practices in these two families are very similar. Both Linda and Barbara *read a lot*, they visit the library regularly and have a good supply of books in the home. Bruce and Graham read mostly work related magazines and information, and both read novels regularly, although there seems to be little time available for such reading. Linda and Barbara both read to their children when they were young and help with homework when they are asked. The children appear to be fairly independent and complete their homework without supervision unless there are problems. Both families are involved with their children's sport and spend a lot of time together. The Hooper children assist with farm chores, whilst the Smith children help with home renovations. The Hoopers and the Smiths both want their children to be happy and want to provide them with every opportunity to make that possible. Where necessary, or if the children wish, they will be sent to private school. Bruce considers it essential for Jason to go to agricultural college if he is going to be a successful farmer. He expects the success of farming in the future to be dependent on technical knowledge. In the Hooper household more writing appears to happen; Linda writes to her daughter Christine (who is at boarding school) every week and also writes regularly to agricultural exchange students from Holland, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Canada. Linda participates more actively in the school community, helping with reading, in the canteen and the library, whereas Barbara does not participate in the school community

as she feels it is not encouraged. In both families, the parents monitor their children's progress carefully and understand their children's literacy development in relation to community expectations.

The third set of families whose similarities question assumptions about urban/rural differences are the Manders-Gunn and O'Leary families. Both of these families are Aboriginal and they share similar educational backgrounds. Penelope Manders grew up in Countrytown but was educated in a mission school. She feels that she learnt a lot at school and values the experience she had. Tom Gunn, on the other hand, felt school was a joke and at the time could not see any value in further education. Anne O'Leary went to a small country school which she really appreciated. After Year 10 she completed a secretarial course. Since then she has worked in Commonwealth and Aboriginal employment agencies. Bill O'Leary was educated in a mission school and then entered the army. He now works as a storeman with an airline. Penelope has enrolled nursing training and is currently completing a pre-diploma course on Adult Aboriginal Health. She works in community health and Tom works for the Shire. Like Penelope, Anne completed a pre-tertiary program in order to train as a computing and typing teacher.

Both Anne and Penelope expressed an interest in reading books written by Aboriginal authors, an interest which they appear to have passed on to their children. Both families enjoy watching television and regularly watch videos. Liz O'Leary and Jinny and Michelle Manders all enjoy reading and read regularly. Anne and Penelope have both monitored their children's reading progress. The interest in reading developed by Liz O'Leary does not appear to be shared by Tom O'Leary who is much more interested in playing basketball.

Penelope and Anne have both participated in further study while their children have been at school. The children have seen their mothers regularly completing assignments, which appears to have fostered an interest in writing by the daughters. Aboriginal education programs have provided opportunities for both mothers to be involved in their children's schooling. Both families share an interest in Country and Western music. Penelope listens to music while doing her housework and Anne and Liz O'Leary listen to Country and Western music often in order to prepare for the regular singing performances given by Liz. Anne and Penelope would both like their children to complete high school and go to university. Jinny Manders aspires to be a teacher or a vet, while Liz O'Leary would like to become a professional singer. However her mother would like her to finish school and go to University, if she is not successful as a singer.

The fourth urban/rural pair of families is the Milardovics and the Longs. Although there are some major differences in the circumstances of these two families, there are also some interesting similarities. Maria and Peter Milardovic (Countrytown) have a stronger economic base to their lives than do Mr and Mrs Long (Redlands). Peter Milardovic is a self-employed builder, whereas Mr Long is a shift worker and Mrs Long a part-time word processor operator. Peter Milardovic and the Longs are all recent migrants to Australia; Maria was born in Australia but her parents immigrated

from Naples. Peter migrated to Australia from Yugoslavia and speaks Croatian. Peter does not read and write in English. Nor does he have access to texts in his first language. Mr Long grew up in Bradford, U.K., but does not read very much. Both Maria and Mrs Long enjoy reading and do so regularly, and they both do much of the writing in the household. In both families, the mothers put a lot of energy into their children's education and have been involved in teaching their children to read outside of school. In both the Milardovic and Long families, one of the parents has also spent time assisting in the primary school.

The fifth and final urban/rural pair of families each have different ethnic backgrounds, but they share the use of family languages other than English, literacy practices around story-telling and television, and formal involvement in the first language learning of their children. The Kuhn family are farmers from Cambodia and the Binayi family are Aboriginal people from the East Kimberley. Mr Kuhn and his children are bi-lingual in Khmer and English. The Binayi's are multi-lingual and bi-dialectic, switching from language to language usually in order to meet the needs of the person being addressed. Members of the Binayi family also tend to use English rather than Kriol when speaking to non-Aboriginal people.

Although neither family appears to have many books in the house, Mr Kuhn and Karen Binayi both enjoy reading and are anxious to help their children speak English effectively and learn to read and write in English. They are both also anxious to maintain the family languages which are spoken in their homes. Television provides a backdrop for life in both families. The Kuhn family sometimes watch SBS. They also watch many movies, family programs and sports programs, as do the Binayi family. The pre-school Kuhn children try to copy the songs and dances from the television and the children learn English from the television. The Binayi's also participate in television watching, by singing the advertisements and Bessie (Karen's mother) sometimes provides a Kriol narrative to describe the action of the television.

Storytelling forms an important part of life in both families. Stories are told by Karen, Bessie and Shirley Binayi. In the Kuhn family storytelling is also an important part of life. The parents tell of their life in Cambodia and the children enjoy retelling these stories. Bessie Binayi teaches the Jaru language and culture at the local primary school. Mr Kuhn teaches Khmer at the Cambodian School on the weekends. In both families an effort is being made by the older members to maintain the language and culture of the families. In both instances this allows the older members of the family to interact with the staff at the local school.

Some Features of Rural Literacy

There are no obvious differences between the literacy practices of the urban and rural schools in our study. Primary schools in rural areas, however, appear to play a more central role in the life of the community than they do in urban communities. Eight out of eleven of the parents (usually the mothers) in Countrytown, Yabby Creek and Blue Creek indicated that they have regularly helped out at the school, either assisting in

classrooms, the library or the canteen. Many of the parents, including the fathers, attend Parents and Citizens' meetings and help with working bees. This does not seem to be so apparent in the urban schools, although some of the urban mothers do paid work in the canteen, and the Long and Bauman families both do voluntary work at Redlands Primary School. As the discussion of the five urban/rural pairs of families has suggested, both urban and rural groups of families contain a broad range of literacy practices. There are however, a few differences which unite a number of the rural families. These differences include some aspects of reading and writing and common concerns about the future in rural areas.

Reading appears to play an important role in the lives of the rural communities. For many of the women especially, reading is still an important form of entertainment. The women seem to transfer their interest in reading to their daughters, who also appear to be genuinely engaged in reading, not as a task set by the school, nor because they are supervised by parents. Reading the newspaper remains an important part of life in the rural communities. Most of the families read the newspaper regularly and feel it is important to keep up with what is going on in the world. The men focus their reading mostly on reading work-related newspapers, magazines and journals. The farmers find it necessary to read farming journals in order to keep up with the farm procedures and practices. The rural boys in the study appeared less interested in reading for entertainment, although like their fathers they are quite interested in news and practical texts. The Malay families do not appear to read for entertainment, to the same extent, however, they read regularly as part of their religious practices.

Writing also appears to happen more often in the rural families. Three of the mothers (Kelly, Manders and Johnson) are participating in upgrading qualifications and write frequently as part of their studies. The Hooper family write regular letters to their daughters in Perth and to visiting agricultural exchange students. The Hendricksen children write to their father regularly and Mrs Hendricksen does her book-work at home, as well as secretarial work for the Pony Club. The Hoopers, Waughs, Johnsons and Milardovics all do their work related book-work at home. Both the George and Jackson families participate in writing as part of their attendance at Malay school.

Most of the rural families are involved in many activities together. Frequently, the children participate in the work and recreational activities of their parents. For example Patrick Kelly is interested and experienced with understandings about permaculture, while the Hooper, Waugh and Johnson families all participate in regular farming activities. The Hendricksen family spend much of their time with the Pony Club, in which their mother is heavily involved. The interest taken by the children in their parents' work and leisure time activities, may transfer to the reading and writing practices associated with these activities.

The final difference between the urban and rural families concerns the rural families' concerns about the future. Linda and John Hooper talked about feeling very sorry for young people at the moment because *there are no apprenticeships and that children are forced to stay on until year twelve when they should be leaving school at fifteen to be a*

mechanic or a carpenter. One of the consequences of their uncertainty about the future is that the Hoopers are increasing their off-farm investment in order to cater for the future of their daughters, who they expect will go to University and not return to live in Countrytown. Amanda Waugh (Yabby Creek) tells how she would like her children to pursue some sort of training after they leave school. Although the family have bought more property to cater for their four sons, she feels it is important for them to have a trade in order to fall back on if things are quiet on the farm, or if things don't work out as planned. Helen Johnson told us that she wanted her children *to see that there's more to life than just this little town*. The growing uncertainty of life in rural communities is clearly encouraging parents to think very seriously about their children's education and possible choices. Parents appear to begin thinking about these issues when their children are still quite young. Changing circumstances in country areas, may well be placing more pressure on parents and children to make the best use of the educational opportunities available to them.

What Did We Learn About Urban and Rural Differences?

Our twenty-three case studies have not provided clear evidence of differences in literacy practices in urban and rural areas. Despite some differences in resources which fairly reflect the relative size of schools and communities, there is little to distinguish between provision in schools and the level of community literacy resources in urban and rural localities.

Many of the differences among family literacy practices appear on both sides of the urban-rural divide. Among our urban and rural case studies we found pairs of ambitious but relatively poorly educated immigrant families from Indian Ocean islands whose literacy practices were influenced by their religious convictions; pairs of prosperous and well-read families that were closely involved in their children's schooling and willing to send them to private schools in the city; pairs of Aboriginal families where the mothers have been involved in further education and have expect that their children will attend university; pairs of relatively poorly educated European immigrant families who are closely involved in their children's schooling; and pairs of families with oral story-telling traditions, strong family languages other than English and active involvement in passing on the language and culture to other members of their communities.

Alongside these patterns of similarity across urban and rural locations, we also found some limited evidence of differences in the perceived roles of schools in the community, in reading and writing practices, and in specific parental concerns about the future in rural areas.

Language Background

The term 'non-English speaking background' (NESB) is currently used as a means of categorising a range of groups including indigenous Aboriginal families, third

generation migrants, and newly arrived peoples. In order to reflect the language diversity of Australia, we deliberately set out to recruit about a dozen such families to work with us in this study. As we began to approach our families it became apparent that the categorisation of some families as NESB was inappropriate and misleading. Of the ten families we approached in the expectation of representing our NESB category, seven families had English as part of their linguistic background. Of the remaining thirteen nominally English-speaking background families in the study, four identified themselves as having some family connection to languages other than English.

Three of the NESB case study families had little contact with English before coming to Australia. Hairul George grew up in a Muslim family on Christmas Island and did not attend school regularly. Mrs George grew up on Cocos and did not go to school. Both Hairul and Mrs George speak Malay as their first language. Mr and Mrs Kuhn are from Cambodia, where they grew up speaking Khmer. They left Cambodia in 1979 and lived in Thai refugee camps for the next eight years before coming to Perth. Mr and Mrs Kha also come from Cambodia and lived in refugee camps in Thailand for eight years before coming to Perth. Although both Mr Kuhn and Mr Kha appeared to speak some English, the families requested an interpreter for the interviews. Mrs Kuhn and Mrs Kha spoke a few words of English.

In the remaining seven of the ten families identified as NESB, the parents grew up speaking, reading and writing in English through their education, through contact with an English speaking community, or through membership of a multilingual community. Between them, this group of seven families speak a broad variety of languages.

- Karen Binayi speaks four Aboriginal languages, Jaru, Walmajarri, Kukatja, and Warlpiri. In addition to English, she also speaks Kriol and non-standard varieties of English.
- Mrs and Mr Ling are Chinese and grew up on Christmas Island. Mrs Ling spoke Hainanese at home, Cantonese in the wider community and learned to speak English at school. Mr Ling speaks Cantonese as his first language which has become the dominant language between Mr and Mrs Ling.
- Mr and Mrs Wong are of Chinese origin and grew up in Malaysia. They speak Mandarin as their first language plus several Chinese dialects and learned to speak English at school.
- Azmi and Susan Jackson are a Malay family brought up on Cocos Island. They speak Malay as their mother tongue and learned English at school which they started at about age ten. They also read the Qur'an in Arabic and translate it into Malay.
- Sara Barnes is Indonesian and grew up speaking Indonesian and English. Allan Barnes learned English as his mother tongue in Australia where he grew up. He learned to speak Indonesian in Indonesia where he worked for thirteen years as a geologist.

- Maria Milardovic came from an Italian family but was born in Australia and spoke Italian at home and English at school. Peter Milardovic was born in Croatia. His first language was Croatian. He learned English when he came to Australia at the age of twenty five in 1968. The Milardovic children all speak English as their first language.
- Penelope Manders and Tom Gunn live in Countrytown. Penelope identifies herself as Noongar and was brought up on a Baptist mission speaking English, from the age of seven to eighteen. All her children speak English.

Among the four nominally English-speaking families who we later realised spoke more than one language, the linguistic diversity included Dutch, Italian, German and Aboriginal English. The O'Leary family identify as Aboriginal and speak English but with Aboriginal words *sprinkled through the language, mainly in public places when they don't want other people to know what they are saying.* Although they have never spoken an Aboriginal language fluently, these language resources have been passed down through generations. They encourage their children to use language in this way and remind them *don't ever forget it you know, because if it goes, it goes.* Mr Hendricksen grew up in Holland speaking Dutch before he came to Australia. Anne Caravaggio came to Australia when she was nine and grew up speaking Dutch, which she now speaks only with her mother. John Caravaggio's grandparents were Italian and his father grew up speaking Italian, but English was the main form of communication when John was young. Mr Bauman of Redlands grew up in Australia in an immigrant family which spoke German and English.

Language Identity and Literacy Practices

In eight of the ten nominally NESB families, the parents feel that the maintenance and development of their mother tongue is important. For the Kha, Kuhn and George families the mother tongue is the dominant language used at home and in their immediate community. Mrs Kuhn and Mrs Kha only speak a few words of English and Mr Kuhn said that he occasionally spoke to the children in English in order to clarify what he was saying in their mother tongue so that the children *could understand.* As well as using their mother tongue for day-to-day communication in the home, these families are involved in a number of formal and informal literacy activities which are conducted in Khmer. The Kuhn and Kha children attend an out-of school Cambodian program taught in Khmer, initiated and run by the Cambodian community. Mr Kuhn is involved in this program as a teacher. The younger children from the Kuhn and Kha families also attend a Khmer-English bilingual program at Radcliffe Primary School. The older siblings who were not in the program expressed some regret at having missed this opportunity.

The Ling, Barnes and Wong families also feel that their mother tongue is important for a variety of reasons including, future employment, cultural understanding, communication with relatives and visits to South East Asia. Although all the children were brought up speaking their mother tongue in early childhood, in the Ling, Barnes,

Wong (and to a lesser degree, Jackson) families, English is the dominant language of the home and the only language used at school. These families are also involved in literacy practices which support their mother tongue, but these practices do not appear to be central to everyday family interactions. For example, the Wongs and the Lings have withdrawn their children from a Saturday school organised by the Chung Wah Association, at the request of the children. Mrs Wong has subsequently employed a home tutor one evening a week to teach her children Catherine and Clare to speak, read and write in Mandarin. Although Catherine expressed some reluctance to learn Mandarin she said *well its good for me* and later, *I want to know it but I just don't want to put up with learning it.* Mrs Wong has stopped speaking to Catherine and Anna in a Chinese dialect because she felt Catherine was getting *mixed up* so they are concentrating on Mandarin. Mrs Ling is trying to encourage Felicity, Paul and John to use Cantonese at home, but has found that the children are reluctant to respond to her in Cantonese. Anna Barnes is teaching herself to re-learn Indonesian by reading books she has brought from Indonesia. Anna said she felt embarrassed about speaking Indonesian to her parents. Mr Barnes described Anna as being very Australian often saying *I'm Australian now.* Susan and Azmi Jackson speak both English and Malay at home. Dawi, one of their four sons, said he *speaks mostly English at home and speaks Malay only at Malay school* which he attends at the week-end to learn about Islam. The classes are conducted in Malay. In addition to this the older boys go the Mosque to study the Qur'an in Arabic. They learn to read and write in Arabic and then have it translated into Malay.

Although a number of literacy practices are carried out in the children's mother tongue and appear to be an integral part of their world, several of the children are beginning to use their first language less as they get older. This potential language loss has important consequences for the development of cultural and religious practices. Although there was a sense of regret about the children's reluctance to use their first language, the choice of which languages to use reflected an on-going dilemma for some families. English literacy was seen as very important for a number of different reasons. For example, Mrs Wong deliberately choose to speak to her children in English just before they went to kindergarten, *so they did not look stupid.* Mrs Ling talked about the importance of speaking English fluently. It would make it *easier for them as they grow older and face Western society, have to fit in.* Mr Kuhn felt it is important to speak English as they are living in an English-speaking country. In the Kha family, despite the bilingual program, English is the crucial link between home and school. Fourteen-year-old Bopha plays a major role in mediating the culture and language of the school. She acts as translator of messages and conveyer of instructions, deciding how much information and in what form it is to be given to her parents. English literacy was also mentioned as important in terms of dietary requirement by the George family.

Literacy Practices and Cultural Homogeneity

Although on the surface some of the families appear to be similar in terms of cultural, religious and linguistic background, they include differences which impact upon their literacy practices. The George and the Jackson families exemplify these differences.

Both families are Malay speaking Muslims from Christmas Island and Cocos Island, they wear traditional clothing as worn by Malay Muslims and both parents work at the meatworks in Countrytown. Literacy practices within the family also appear to be quite similar. Many literacy practices revolve around learning about Islam and reading the Qur'an, a variety of written texts are evident in each family and television and radio are used as a form of entertainment and information in both families. In addition to this, English literacy is seen as important in both families. Although Mr and Mrs George are less fluent in English than Susan and Azmi Jackson, who both learned to speak English at school, the children in both families are fluent English speakers.

The difference between the families seems to lie in the parents view of their children's future. In a discussion about his daughters' future, Hairul George said that he wanted them *to continue until Year 12 if they can . If she cannot go we cannot do anything else.* Hairul is not sure about their future employment but mentioned that he didn't really want his daughters to work in the meatworks *Because they are... can talk well.* It appears that marriage is an important consideration in terms of their future. Hairul said that his daughters *maybe going to find a job first and then after that maybe ... I don't know ... Of course people must be married right.* Hatini said she had no idea what she wanted to be when she grew up and had no interest in anything else except modelling which she does not think she will be allowed to do.

In contrast to this, both parents and older children in the Jackson family have a very specific view of what they want in the future. Azmi warns his children that if they don't work hard at school and succeed they will *end up like your dad, sitting at home unemployed.* He hopes that the children will go on to further education or be successful at school in order to get a job when they leave. Dawi Jackson said he will probably leave Country town and go and live in city, becoming a doctor or a lawyer. There seems to be a gender dimension to the aspirations of each family. The boys in the Jackson family seem to be expected to plan in order to take responsibility for providing for their future wives and children. Education and employment is seen as the way to achieve this, whereas to some extent ensuring a *right* marriage seems to be the way in which Siti and Hatini's future will be secured.

The Milardovic and the Ling families seem very different on the surface, and indeed they are in terms of linguistic and cultural background and migrant status. However closer examination reveals some interesting similarities. Although the parents in these two families are bilingual (Milardovic) and multi-lingual (Lings) all the children use English as their dominant language. Neither family is involved in community groups and each family tends to do things as a discreet group occasionally involving their extended family. Mrs Ling and Maria Milardovic both have prime responsibility as home makers, Mrs Ling works from home as a tailor and Maria Milardovic looks after her sister's young child. It is the women in the families that take responsibility for supporting the children's homework as both men feel their English literacy skills are inadequate. Both Maria Milardovic and Mrs Ling feel that education is very important and spend a great deal of time and energy at home with the children supporting their literacy development. Both families have high aspirations for their children, although

Mrs Ling does not want to 'push' them, maintaining that it is important for them to be happy and Maria Milardovic feels it is important that her children have some choice in their future education.

School Literacy Practices Relating to Language Identity

For all of the diversity of home language and culture, there was much less diversity in the schools we observed. Many of the teachers in our study use similar literacy practices derived from a state-wide in-service program called First Steps. Although this program has been well received and provides a way of helping teachers to map children's progress and develop a range of literacy strategies, the associated literacy practices developed by some teachers do not appear to take account of individual needs of some children or cultural differences between them. The homogeneous nature of many of the learning and teaching styles may disadvantage students from families which who do not share this particular view of language learning or the common cultural understandings which underlie the program.

Some of the school texts constructed a view of the world that may lead to stereotypical images of particular groups as well as creating a partisan view of certain historical events. Among the examples we heard were references to *dark people,* to Christopher Columbus as the person who *discovered America,* and to James Cook as *murdered by Hawaiian Islanders.* In addition to this, many of the references to Aboriginal peoples were negative and derogatory. In one instance there was a reference to *John Forrest being attacked by Aborigines in Esperance.* In another instance, the character Blinky Bill complains about the Aborigines hunting: *Just as well for you Mr Wombat that there are no Aborigines here!*

Certain school literacy practices also assumed shared knowledge that may not have been available to some of the students. Acquiring new knowledge and understanding about different cultures is an important part of learning. However, this raises the question as to whether some assumptions about shared cultural knowledge actually exclude some children from taking part in or fully understanding what is being learned. For example, when asked about some work on Ned Kelly, Hatini George seemed to be confused. Of all of the NESB children in the study, Thy Kuhn seemed most affected by the displacement of his home language and culture. He seemed confused and then disillusioned with some of the tasks he was asked to do and this resulted in him giving-up or not attempting them at all. Now in Year 6, Thy is barely literate in English or Khmer.

In contrast to these observations of a mono-cultural and mono-lingual school environment, teachers at Radcliffe Primary, Yabby Creek and Countrytown Pre-Primary were attempting to relate the language and culture of the wider community to the school. This is evident through the development of bilingual programs, teachers' knowledge of the wider community, their questioning of assumptions particular incidents, as well as the development of resources that reflect the cultures of some of their pupils. In addition to this, Redlands Primary has an Aboriginal liaison officer and

Vietnamese aide and Mr Chanthan is employed at Radcliffe Primary as an interpreter, assisting teachers in K-7 classrooms. However, resources are scarce and the teachers have responsibility for producing and developing appropriate materials. As a consequence of this many of the texts in the Radcliffe bilingual classrooms consist of hand written texts placed on top of the English script, raising questions about the relative status of particular scripts. Finally it is interesting to note that the aim of the Cambodian bilingual program is to ease the transition from home to school, develop literacy skills in Khmer and English, raise the children's self-esteem and provide a 'bridge' to Year 3. However, there does not seem to be any opportunity for the program to be extended beyond Year 2.

What Did We Learn About Language Background and Literacy Practices?

Four broad conclusions may be drawn from our study of NESB families. They concern the uniformity of the school environments, the diversity of the home environments, parents attitudes to language loss, and the use of 'NESB' as a category of analysis in the study.

The children of our NESB case study families attended schools which were remarkably uniform. The same whole-language based classroom strategies were found in many of the classrooms, the texts in use in the schools were almost uniformly mono-cultural and sometimes ethnocentric, and the school programs often assumed specifically Australian cultural knowledge which excluded some of the children in our case study families. There were some exceptions to this monolingual language environment, the most significant of which was the English-Khmer bilingual program in Years 1 and 2 at Radcliffe Primary School.

In contrast, the diversity among the nominally NESB families lead to a range of literacy practices more varied than those of nominally ESB families. These variations included a range of literacy practices associated with religion, homework, reading and writing, and academic involvement with their schools. Even when families appear superficially similar - sharing the same race, class, language, place of origin and current location - closer observation shows that the same literacy practices may have significantly different meanings in different families.

Among the bilingual and multilingual families we worked with, parents faced a continuing dilemma about cultural and linguistic choices. On the one hand many parents see English oracy and literacy as the means of attaining a good education, a necessary condition of living in Australia and the path to a particular future. On the other hand, many parents wanted to avoid the loss of culture which accompanies their children's loss of languages. In some cases where parents were trying to support the mother tongue, children seem to be actively resisting this. As English has become their dominant language, it replaces their mother tongue. In a few other cases, where there is insufficient support for the language of home or school, the bleak prospect is that children will become semi-lingual and semi-literate.

Our final conclusion is that the category of NESB is not very helpful in expressing the range of language diversity in our case study families. It characterises these families by an attribute they do not have rather than by qualities which they have. In fact many of them are bilingual or multilingual. It overlooks the fact that many immigrant families (especially those from the Asia-Pacific region) are already familiar with varieties of English from their schooling or membership of multilingual cultures. This blunt category also obscures the language diversity of second and third generation families whose children pass as English Speaking Background but whose parents were raised in the context of another language.

Social Class

The quantitative research literature on students' school performance consistently reports a relationship between social class and performance (see, for example, Walberg & Tsai, 1985). Research which has examined literacy practices among different social groups (Chall & Snow, 1982; Heath, 1983) has led to the conclusion that "children whose home literacy practices most closely resemble school literacy practices are more successful in school" (Auerbach, 1989, p.167). Another, related, strand of research which has considered the relationship between parental involvement and school performance has led to the conclusion that ."practices such as shared reading, reading aloud, making a variety of print materials available, and promoting positive attitudes toward literacy have been found to have a significant impact on children's literacy learning" (Morrow & Paratore, 1993, p.194). School success in literacy has also been associated with parent involvement in schooling including "creating a home atmosphere conducive to learning, responding to school communications, helping at school, performing academic tasks with children, and working in parent advisory groups" (Auerbach 1989, p. 168).

Because we suspected that the influence of social class on literacy practices would be at least as substantial as any differences which might be due to urban or rural location, we set out to recruit families in higher or lower social class communities. The device we used to make this distinction was whether or not schools were included in one of the Commonwealth government's programs of support for disadvantaged schools.

Among the twenty-three families in the study were six city families whose children were enrolled in Disadvantaged Schools Program schools and six city families whose children were not enrolled in Disadvantaged Schools Program schools. Of the eleven rural families, we worked with three rural families whose children were enrolled in a Disadvantaged Schools Program school, three families whose children were enrolled in a school disadvantaged by isolation, one family whose children were enrolled in a private school with relatively few children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and four families whose children were enrolled in a school not funded by the Disadvantaged Schools Program.

The absence or presence of schools on the list of disadvantaged schools provided the study with a clear first cut on social class differences of school communities. Schools

either were or were not eligible for additional funding on the basis of an Australian-wide index of disadvantage. The individual families with which we worked in each school community, however, could not be fitted so neatly to an "upper" or "lower" dichotomy. As we analysed the data on family literacy practices, we wondered whether there were, in fact, any regularities in the patterns of literacy practices we found in the two groups of schools. For some pairs or groups of families, there did seem to be strong sets of similarities; for other pairs and sets of families, there was no obvious pattern of relationships between school type, family circumstances and literacy practices. The next section provides a summary of our findings. A more detailed account of the issue of social class in the case studies appears in Chapter 5.

Literacy Practices in Seven Families

Looked at through the lens of social class differences, the evidence from the Caravaggio, Scott/Clay/Bailey and Kha families seems to suggest an association between social class differences and family literacy practices. On a continuum from the Kha family through the Scott/Clay/Baileys to the Caravaggios, family literacy practices seem increasingly supportive of the kinds of activities the children's schools define as literate. The Caravaggios are tertiary educated, employed and prosperous. Their children attend a school which is not entitled to additional funding through the Disadvantaged Schools Program. The literacy practices of the Caravaggio families closely resemble the kinds of activities valued by schools. They buy books when they travel to the city or to a larger town on the coast, borrow books from the library, read *The Bulletin* and *The Weekend Australian* and read aloud to their youngest child. They help out at school through the Parents and Citizens Association and Ann is involved in the school's mathematics and library classes, and provide effective academic assistance to their oldest child.

The adults in the Scott/Clay/Bailey family work in blue-collar occupations, left school at the end of the compulsory years, live in rented housing provided by the state housing authority, and their children attend a Disadvantaged Schools Program school. The Scott/Clay/Bailey family owns encyclopaedias but makes more use of puzzle and crossword books, they make little use of their libraries, Anne Scott is involved with the school canteen but not the school's academic program. She energetically supervises homework but cannot assist Millie with some academic tasks sent home by the school.

Mr and Mrs Kha work as strawberry pickers in season, but at the time the data were collected they were both unemployed. The Kha family owns a few books in Cambodian and English and the children have a much stronger grasp of English than either Mr and Mrs Kha. Mr Kha helps his children with Cambodian school homework but not regular school homework. He visits the bilingual class attended by his son, but does not participate in lessons in the class. The older child borrows books from the library for school projects but not for personal reading and the younger child owns only an atlas he won as a school prize.

These are, however, just three of the twenty-three case studies collected in this project. Few of the case studies allow for such a neat juxtaposition. Considering the circumstances of the Long, Waugh, Kelly and Jackson families increases the complexity of the relationship between social class and literacy practices. The Long family would be considered working class in terms of parents' education, income, or occupation. They live in a neighbourhood where many of the houses are rented from the state housing authority, and their children attend a Disadvantaged Schools program school. Their family literacy practices, however, seem very similar to those of the Caravaggios. They provide a home environment conducive to learning, they participate in shared reading activities and read aloud to their younger child, they provide academic assistance for their children, and they are involved in the academic life of the school. Like the Caravaggios, they are well informed about their children's school performance and they regard school success as important for their children. When they help their children with school work, they do so in a way that echoes school attitudes and practices. Their daughter is a weak reader, but rather than correcting their daughter's reading syllable by syllable, Mrs Long uses a shared reading strategy and focuses first on making meaning from the text.

The Waugh family, on the other hand, combines significant financial resources with literacy practices more reminiscent of the Scott/Clay/Bailey family. Their home provides a relatively narrow range of print materials, they are not involved in the school's academic program, and when Amanda Waugh listened to Christopher read aloud her efforts to assist him led to a focus on sounding out words and the loss of meaning. The Waugh family would like their children to do well at school if that is what the children choose, but would be equally happy if the boys learned a trade that would *give them something to fall back on* if farm incomes were to drop.

The Kelly family seems similar in some ways to the Scott/Clay/Bailey family They are not well off financially, the parents have relatively narrow reading habits and one of the adults in each family has quite limited literacy skills. They do, however, make active use of written texts that they need to read, such as Bridgit's nursing texts and Kevin's permaculture books. Unlike any of the families so far described, the Kellys are not involved with the school. Bridgit acknowledged their difference when she told us that she thought the teachers regarded her as eccentric. Also unlike most of the other families involved in this study, the Kellys have a child who is plainly in conflict with the school. Nor does the family take the conventional attitude to school success. When their children want to participate in school-like activities - such as Sinead's parallel reading activity - Bridgit joins in, but they seem to attach no more value to literacy activities than to Patrick's musical learning. They are open to the possibility that their children pursue their interests through further education, but do not believe in applying any pressure towards their children's school success.

The Kelly family fails to fit a structure which pairs class and literacy practices because they choose to stand outside the mainstream. The Jackson family stands outside the mainstream for different reasons. In their case, issues of language, culture and religion separate them from mainstream life in Countrytown. They are as interested as any of

the other families in school success as a means social mobility, but much of the boys' out of school time is taken up with literacy practices associated with Islam. These practices involve learning to read the sacred text in Arabic, a language the boys do not speak. The text is sometimes translated into Malay, a language they speak but do not read. This form of reading has great religious value to the family and the Malay community in Countrytown, but it operationalises a different definition of reading than school literacy. In the school, reading is taken to be about making meaning through literal understanding of the text. The work of the Malay school, it seems, stands entirely outside the school's understanding of its work, and the richness of the boys' knowledge of the Qur'an, of Arabic and of Malay goes unremarked.

Static and Dynamic Images of Social Class

In framing this study, we began with an either/or indicator of social class: whether or not children were enrolled in Commonwealth disadvantaged program schools. This is a crude and static operational definition of social class which implies that the mean on a set of social indicators adequately summarises all of the variation within a school community. Such means may be adequate for statistical purposes, such as justifying the allocation of disadvantaged schools money, but it overestimates the impact of social structures in individuals' behaviour and underestimates the impact of their personal agency. The real world of class relations is not static set of social structures, but "a world where some kinds of possibilities are constantly being opened up, others closed down; where some kinds of practice lead into unexpected traps, and others to unexpected transformation; in sum, where structural mutation is the rule rather than the exception" (Connell, 1983, p. 157).

In this study, we think that there are some working class families where possibilities are being opened up. The Long family, for example, seems to be in a state of transformation. They are closely involved with their children's school work and are pleased with their progress. After some intervention from the school and her parents, Sally is now improving. Andrew is *top at the moment and he's head boy.* Next year he has the choice of scholarships at three selective high schools. In a somewhat different way, the Kha family was not able to intervene to help their children with their academic work, but Mr Kha's insistence that his children work hard and do well at school may be just as powerful a force. As he said when we first interviewed him and reiterated at later interviews, he often says to his children *you have to go to school, working hard at school, don't be lazy ... don't like father go to work at the farm.* The Kha family shares this sentiment with the Longs, with Azmi Jackson who said *If you have no education you will be like your dad ... I will always talk to my son, push him to study very hard,* and with the middle class Caravaggios who expect that Paul will be *quite accomplished academically.*

There are also some families where possibilities are being closed down. The Kelly family values their children's independence over conformity to the school's norms, but the family's scepticism about the value of schooling seems to be echoed in Patrick's marginalisation within his Year 6 class. Similarly, the Scott/Clay/Bailey family's

acceptance that Millie is *never going to be a student* and the Waugh family's judgement that the value of education is that it *provides something to fall back* both serve to limit the prospect that their children's schooling is going to play a part in social mobility.

What Did We Learn About Social Class and Literacy Practices?

This more mobile image of class relations leads to a different formulation of the relationship between social class and literacy practices. Instead of suggesting that the Caravaggios are firmly located at one end of the class structure and the Kha family is stuck at the other end without the appropriate linguistic, cultural or financial resources to assist their children, a more open and ambiguous set of relationships emerges.

The literacy practices of *some* middle class parents are different from *some* working class families. They tend to have more books and magazines, and more involvement with their children's academic work. When they help with homework they often do the same kind of work that teachers do. But the mutation of the class structure and the transformation of individual families possibly begins to occur when families such as the Longs value and adopt the practices that pay off in schools; becoming involved in the academic program of the school, providing the kind of assistance with homework that teachers believe to be useful, and setting or sharing their children's high aspirations.

In other cases, such as the Kha and Jackson families, where the literacy practices may be tangential to those of the school for cultural reasons, the active belief in the possibility of growth and change may be as important as any particular set of school-like literacy practices.

We understand the evidence of this study to confirm that some of the middle class literacy practices identified in the international research literature are present in some of our middle class families, and that these practices are likely to provide a support their children's school learning. We also understand the study to confirm that some of these practices are either absent from some of our working class families or, crucially, are conducted in such a way as to have a different meaning and, thereby, a different impact. We believe, however, that the personal agency of individual families can be as important as their location on a static social stratification. Families themselves create 'middle class' or school-supportive practices in a working class location, or create 'working class' practices in a middle class location, or support ambition for social mobility through a strong valuing of education.

Home and School Literacy Practices

The overwhelming impression from our case study data is of diversity of the home literacy practices and similarity among the school literacy practices. This is not to say that all classrooms were exactly the same, but in Western Australia the *English Language Syllabus* for Years K-7 and the *First Steps* in-service program for teachers seem to have had a great effect upon the content of language and literacy instruction and the strategies used by teachers throughout the state. On the other hand, the literacy

practices of the home were much more varied, reflecting the language, literacy, and culture of individual families.

Literacy Sites

Classroom environments were dominated by print which was used by teachers for many purposes. In some classrooms environmental print was used to control behaviour, with the class rules and penalties prominently displayed. In Year 1 classrooms print was also used to give information about birthdays and tying shoelaces, about how to form the letters of the alphabet and common letter sequences, about colour words and sentence beginnings. In many classrooms, print was used to encourage children, with charts of progress and displays of children's work. It was also used for classroom organisation, with lists of classroom helpers and lists of the days' tasks written on the blackboard. Print was also used to construct literacy practices. In one classroom a chart entitled *Am I becoming a good speller?* listed desirable habits and attitudes towards spelling. In another classroom there was a poster called *Homework Rules* which gave advice on homework, emphasising the high value placed on homework, that it was to be kept in *a special place* and done *neatly and carefully*, as well as to be given in *on time*.

In terms of access to library books and in the amount of environmental print available to children, the literacy environments of the schools were uniformly rich. In most classrooms there was a large supply of books of various genres which exclusively were in English, except in the English/Khmer bilingual classroom at Radcliffe. In spite of the cultural diversity of the school populations, however, there was little acknowledgment of the diversity in selection of these resources.

The homes of the families varied greatly in the amount of printed material available to children. In one home, the children owned only one book, an atlas that a child had won. In other families, individual children owned as many as 200 books. Many families, regardless of class, location or culture owned encyclopaedias. The Kuhns from Radcliffe, the Wongs from Windsor Park, and the Georges from Countrytown had all bought encyclopedias to help their children with their homework. The texts owned by adults in the study varied with the culture and values of the families. Most families read the newspapers at some point in the week, but not many took the paper each day. Some families had religious texts available, including *The Bible*, *The Book of Mormon*, the *Qur'an* and the teachings of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The texts owned by many of the families were in English, although the Kuhns had a Khmer translation of the *Bible* and other writings in that language and the Georges had the *Qur'an* in Arabic. Some of the families took women's magazines such as *Women's Weekly*, whilst others took more serious journals such as the *Bulletin*. The Carroll family of Radcliffe took many journals, including religious magazines and the publications of their network sales business, one of which was entitled *The Instant Millionaire*.

The books in the home came from a wide variety of sources. Many families used the local library. Others found book exchanges and swap meets to be good sources of reading material. The Caravaggio family from Countrytown had been to the *Save the Children Fund Book Sale* in the holidays and also bought from bookshops while away, since *the choice in the newsagency here is a bit limited.* Similarly the Johnsons of Yabby Creek had bought books during a recent visit to Perth. The Ashton Scholastic children's book club, which was run by schools in the city and in the country was also a source of books for children in many of the families in the study. The Long children had bought books from a book sale organised by the school for Bookweek. Anne and John Caravaggio had also belonged to a mail order book club.

Reading

The early years classrooms which we visited were characterised by an emphasis on learning to read. Julian Barnes in the Pre-primary centre at Windsor Park had completed a concepts of print test and was engaged in various reading and reading-related activities, including a *quiet reading time*, even though he said, *No I can't read, but I know pictures.* In this way he was being constructed as a reader by engaging in reading-like behaviours. The Year 1 children at Radcliffe read in Khmer from a big book and both the Year 1 and 2 children constructed a Christmas alphabet in English from a book that they had been reading. Even at these early stages of reading there was not only an emphasis on the decoding of print, but also on understanding what had been read. As Joshua Kuhn's teacher read a story she asked the children to predict what *might be in the box* and to name animals which appeared in the book.

In their classrooms, the older children were taught more sophisticated strategies for using and gaining meaning from print. Kate Bauman and Sally Long in Year 3 at Redlands learnt how to construct a literary socio-gram to aid their understanding of the story of Pinocchio. Kate's sister Kirsty in Year 6 was involved in a reciprocal reading lesson in which the children had to predict, question, clarify and summarise the text they were reading in order to gain meaning. In addition to learning to read, there was also an emphasis on reading to learn in the classrooms. For example, Andrew Smith and John Ling's Year 2 class at Windsor Park had been reading books about dinosaurs and had a discussion about what they'd learnt. The Year 6 class at the same school used a worksheet and their dictionaries to help them learn about AIDS.

There was some attempt by the schools to encourage individual reading for pleasure and relaxation. Silent reading sessions were observed in several classrooms. In the Year 7 class at Yabby Creek, the children had individual 'conferences' or discussions with their teacher about the books that they had been reading. In the Year 7 class at Windsor Park there was a strong emphasis on literature and the themes from literature were used to motivate learning in other areas. The children in this class were encouraged to write comments in a "visitor's book" about the books they had read. There was some degree of censorship by the teacher of this class who commented that she would not provide *Sweet Valley High* books, although the children could bring them to school if they wished. By choosing books for study by the class which were

different from those read by many of the children at home and by not encouraging the reading of some popular books, this teacher showed the children that she valued some books over others.

In many other classrooms fiction was read to children and discussed. There were often tasks to be performed following the reading, such as a class discussion of similes following a tape-recorded reading in Year 6 at Windsor Park. In this Year 6 class the children were also required to examine the illustrations and text of *Grandad's Gifts* by Paul Jennings in order to establish if the mood in one matched the other. In such sessions it seemed that the purpose of reading was not only for enjoyment but also to analyse the ways in which fiction is constructed.

Worksheets and workbooks were used in many classrooms, although there were some classrooms where there was no evidence of worksheets. In the Year 6/7 classroom of Thy Kuhn and Bopha Kha at Radcliffe, two worksheets were given out in one lesson and the class apparently were so used to completing them that the teacher felt that no explanation of what was to be done was necessary. For Thy and Bopha, the purpose of the worksheets was not clear, and they were not able to complete them in any meaningful way. Bopha retired from the activity and Thy, after displaying frustration, rushed out of the classroom at the end of the lesson to play basketball.

Through the ways in which they used reading, teachers were constructing the children as readers in different ways. In their lesson, Thy Kuhn and Bopha Kha were learning that the purpose of reading was to gain an answer which was correct in form as well as in content. Their younger brothers in the bilingual class were learning the roles of participants in group reading sessions in two languages and their purpose for reading was to analyse the internal structure of words as well as to gain information from the text. Andrew Smith and John Ling in Year 2 at Windsor Park were learning that a purpose for reading could be to share information with others, as were the Year 7 children at Redlands. There were also occasions in schools where children were shown the enjoyment which can come from personal response to literature and which may provide the incentive for further individual reading. In some instances, as in the Year 7 class at Windsor Park, children were being constructed as text analysts for whom one of the purposes for reading was to examine the characters in books, the craft of the author in creating them and how the author could manipulate the feelings of readers. The examination of text and illustrations by the Year 6 children at Windsor Park and the literary socio-gram constructed by the Year 3 children at Redlands also involved the children reading as analysts of text. Whilst the children in different classes and at different times were learning different purposes for reading, all were learning that reading can, to a greater or lesser extent, lead to discussion with others.

In our case studies, mothers' and fathers' reading habits were somewhat different. Mothers' involvement in their children's school work led them to read their children's school texts and novels. Mothers often appeared to read much more than fathers. Their non-fiction reading included books related to study, autobiographies, newspapers and magazines such as *Woman's Day* and *Woman's Weekly*. With regard to fiction, some women made it clear that they had some boundaries when it came to what they

read. For example, one woman said that she'd read anything but *Mills and Boon, that's my limit.* For other women romantic fiction and murder mysteries were favourite fiction forms. Fathers' non-fiction reading tended to be work related. Other topics included sport, documentaries, and permaculture. One father said that he read woman's magazines when the machines at his workplace were not working and that he had consulted a cooking book in order to make a meal. Fiction read by fathers included detective and mysteries, autobiographies, newspapers and journals. For one of the fathers, the only reading he did was the newspaper where he said *I would start at the back and work my way to the front.*

Horse books, including the *Saddle Club* series were very popular among some young girls. Other books read by girls were the *Babysitters Club*, *Secret Seven*, and *Sweet Valley High* series. Boys tended to read adventure series, fantasy and mythological books such as the *Shenara* series. Children's reading, however, was not always gender-coded. Both girls and boys enjoyed reading Paul Jennings, Roald Dahl, ghost stories, and Choose Your Own Adventure Books. One boy stated that he *loves reading love stories.* One girl was observed reading a Bruce Lee magazine during silent reading at school, a magazine she apparently translated into Malay for her father.

In most of the families the children had been read to from an early age. The book reading sessions for some of the children were very informal: Karen Binayi of Blue Creek looked at a book with 4-year-old Kerston when she was visiting the researcher's office. For others the bed-time story was a nightly ritual. When Mrs Long read *Beware of Boys* to Sally at bed-time, Sally joined in and the ritual was finished with a kiss. The purposes of many of these sessions seemed to be to familiarise children with the conventions of literacy in a supportive, loving, enjoyable environment.

The Kuhn and Carroll families of Radcliffe both spent time in reading and interpreting religious texts. In these two families the religious practices of the home are similar to those of the school, with an emphasis on the sharing of reading and related discussion which entailed some textual analysis. For the George and Jackson families of Countrytown, the religious readings were from the Qur'an. The text was in Arabic, rather than their mother tongue of Malay. Whilst it seemed desirable to be able to understand the meaning, it did not seem to be of paramount importance. For their children, religious literacy practices were very different from school literacy practices, where correct oral reading did not seem to play a large part and where children were encouraged to gain their own meaning from text through discussion.

Another purpose for reading at home was connected with games that parents played with children or that the children played with each other. In the case of games such as Monopoly, which was played by several families, including the Baumans and Longs of Redlands, the purpose of reading was to find out the instructions for proceeding through the game. Several families were also interested in quizzes, in which the questions and answers had to be read. The Longs seemed to play the game not just as a family pastime, but more for the purpose of adding to their store of knowledge. A few children used reading to gain knowledge by themselves. Jake Carroll of Radcliffe was often learning something from a book, which at the time of the study was Italian, and

Andrew Long had taught himself to use the new computer by following a tutoring program. Nevertheless, much of the reading done for learning in the home by children was associated with homework assignments.

Writing

As with reading, there was a heavy emphasis on learning to write in school and also on writing in order to complete school learning tasks. In the early grades there was an emphasis on correct letter formation which seemed to be reinforced in later years with an emphasis on setting out and neatness of work. There was also an emphasis on correct spelling in most classrooms, although in Years 1 and 2 children's invented phonetic spelling was often encouraged. Andrew Caravaggio in Year 1 at Highglen was given a spelling test and he had a *Spelling Journal* in which to write the words he needed to learn. These *Spelling Journals*, issued by the State Education Department, were a feature of most classrooms as was partner testing of children's individual words to be learnt. Whole class spelling tests were also observed. In addition to a *Spelling Journal* many children had *Have-a-go* pads in which they were encouraged to attempt spellings of difficult words before writing them and some also had *Top-up* books in which words to be learnt were written before being transferred to *Spelling Journals*. The importance attached to spelling in the writing process was also evident in the environmental print on some classroom walls.

A further purpose for writing, apart from learning spelling and practising neatness, was to learn and practise the conventions of certain defined genres. In Hatini George's Year 7 classroom in Countrytown, Mr Roberts drew the children's attention to *Report, Exposition, Narrative, Procedure, Explanation* and *Recount* text forms. The Year 6/7 at Yabby Creek had worked through four of these text types, and the formulae for writing them were evident in many classrooms. Kate Bauman in Year 3 at Redlands was learning how to write a report. She had been required to organise the facts on pelicans that she had collected from books. The emphasis on correct genre forms had also influenced the daily diary writing which was seen in several classrooms. In the Year 6/7 classroom at Yabby Creek, the children were reminded to establish the *setting* with the formula of *who, when, where, what, why* and to use one paragraph for each event.

In some classrooms the children were also practising writing skills using a conference-process approach, in which they were encouraged to write as if they were professional writers, and to use jargon specific to the approach: Patrick Kelly's Year 6/7 class in Countrytown was asked to *conference* each other then start *publishing*. Daily writing practice, which sometimes took the form of diary writing, was also a feature of many classrooms. In Karen Hooper and Paul Caravaggio's Year 7 class at Highglen, Mrs Painter described daily writing as a *First Steps* strategy. Many of the writing practices observed in the classrooms were standardised throughout the State by means of workbooks published by the Education Department and by formulae for writing which followed various curriculum documents.

The purposes for writing in the home were much more immediately obvious than those of the school. For parents it was often work-related. Some parents like Mrs Kelly and Ms Manders from Countrytown were studying and had to write in order to complete assignments. Families also wrote in order to keep in touch with relatives, especially with those who lived a long distance away. Families wrote shopping lists, paid bills and some left notes for family members who were not home through work and other commitments.

Some families used writing in ways which were similar to those of the school. The Carroll family wrote journals which were similar to the diary writing which was a feature of many classrooms. Further, the family wrote their goals on cards and read them morning and evening in order to *change habits* and to *achieve anything in life*. The Ling children of Windsor Park were encouraged by their mother to take a note-book to their Presbyterian worship and John Ling regularly wrote in his workbook with his mother. The Wongs also of Windsor Park practised their Mandarin by writing secret diaries which could not be read by other children. Several of the children wrote for enjoyment. Nevertheless, as with reading, much of the writing done at home by the children was homework from school.

An important difference between the home and school contexts was in the degree of formality. In school, many of the literacy practices were formal or ritualised - newstelling, reciprocal reading, project writing, graphic outlines, literary socio-grams, formal work-book and work-sheet exercises and writing in different genres. Even in Julian Barnes' pre-primary class the children had been required to make scrap-books which contained identical items. There were certain prescribed ways for doing such activities. Sometimes these were explained to children during lessons we observed and at other times children were expected to know what to do without explanation. In contrast, home literacy practices were often informal and spontaneous, with the exception of many activities of the Carroll family which were almost as structured as school activities. Apart from homework and religious practices the children usually chose what, when and where to read and write.

Other Literacy Practices: Storytelling, Television, Radio and Computer Use

An emphasis on story telling was evident in families who had experienced a predominantly oral culture. For the Kuhn family of Radcliffe it was the means by which the culture was passed on to the children. Em told how her mother valued this practice: *Sometimes for our bedtime story they tell us a bedtime story before we go to sleep...my mum said like we grow bigger we have children we pass them on.* Both Em and her brother Thy told stories of life in Cambodia and Thailand which either they or their parents had experienced. Karen Binayi of Blue Creek told us a ghost story; her grandmother Bessie reported that 5-year-old Christian Binayi is also a good story teller. Although story telling was evidently highly valued in these two families, it did not seem to be so important in schools. Where storytelling was observed, in the context of the news-telling sessions of many classrooms, it was embedded in a very structured form.

All schools owned computers and used them to greater or lesser extent. Access to computers at home appeared to be dependent on the financial status of the parents. Most of the families at Windsor Park owned computers, whereas neither Cambodian family in Radcliffe owned one. Jake Carroll of Radcliffe used the computer to generate a *Scripture Quiz* since the religious practices of the family did not allow him to play games on that day. It seemed, however, that the main use for computers was playing games.

In some families, the use of computers seemed to be gendered, with fathers and sons being the primary users of computers. In the Caravaggio family, the boys are in the forefront in playing computer games. The three boys in the Smith family played computers together and *have a library of over one hundred games* which they trade with other children. They also have a portable computer game that they play in the car when on long driving trips. Similarly in the Long family, both father and son had been working through a word processing program and also played computer games together. In both the Johnson and Waugh family, the father was the primary computer user. Less frequently, mothers and daughters also used computers in the home for word processing purposes or computer games. In one of the families, a girl used the computer at her mother's work to write poetry as well as play computer games, for drawing and for word processing.

All families owned and used televisions. The number per family varied, but the Scott/Clay/Bailey family of Radcliffe owned four and the Khas also of Radcliffe owned three. In both of these families and some others the children had a television in their own bedrooms and were able to watch it alone with few parental restrictions. For other families television viewing was a family social event. The Binayi family, for example, discussed a television movie as they watched, translating the text into Kriol. In spite of the potential of television to provide the kinds of discussion and analysis of texts which were valued in some classrooms, many parents were wary when talking about TV watching. The Carroll family of Radcliffe, for example, had an *uneasy relationship with television* and Mrs Kelly of Countrytown distrusted the values of television programs. In other families the television was on for much of the day and night, beginning for Em Kuhn of Radcliffe at 6 AM with aerobics and cartoons and ending well after 9.30 PM for Thy when he watched movies. Regardless of the amount of time they watched television, families across the range of social class, location and cultural background told us they watched *Neighbours*, *Home and Away*, *A Country Practice*, *Sale of the Century*, *Sesame Street* and *Playschool* as well as various sport, cartoon and news programs.

Although not as popular as television, the radio played a part in the life of many families. For some it was used as background noise, but for others it was used to signal that it was time to catch the school bus, as a means of finding out about the Australian way of life, or to find out when to return to work at the meat works after the lambing season. For several of the participants in the study, the radio was a powerful means of influencing others. For example, when Coles stores were offering Macintosh computers to schools in exchange for their dockets, the children of Yabby Creek wrote

to radio stations in Perth complaining that their nearest Coles store was 150 kilometres away. They received enough dockets from listeners all over the State to exchange for nine Macintoshes. Similarly, Mr Bauman of Redlands had contacted talk-back radio in order to get a cross walk moved. In contrast to the central role of radio and television in the homes, there was relatively little use of radio and television in schools.

Homework and parental involvement

All the parents in the study were interested in their children's literacy progress and had shown this by their willingness to take part in the study. Nevertheless, the role which parents took upon themselves in developing their children's literacy varied from family to family. Mrs. Milardovic of Countrytown had taught her preschool children to read, Mrs Smith of Windsor Park had taught her son John because he hadn't learnt to read in Year 1 and Mrs Long of Redlands was helping Sally who was having difficulty in reading. On the other hand Anne Scott of Radcliffe told how Millie's teacher had expected her to be involved in Millie's reading in Year 1, but she had passed the problem back to the teacher: *I just said to her, "You know you're the one who gets paid to teach her to read between 9.10 and 3.15 and if you can't, then this is your problem, not mine."* Most parents, however, expressed the opinion that they should be involved in their children's literacy development.

For many children homework became an extension of the ritualised activities of the school day. Reading was heard by most of the families which had children in the junior primary years. For the Kuhn and Kha children this seemed to be all the help with homework that they were able to get, and only the fathers could give this as neither mother was literate. These parents were apparently not aware of the homework requirements for their older children. Some of the other parents were not always able to give help with homework as they did not understand the subject matter of the assignments. Several parents commented that they could not give help with mathematics as the children grew older. This did not necessarily prevent the children from receiving help. Mrs Ling of Windsor Park, for example, told her daughter to make use of the university students who attended their Church.

Gender: A Pattern of Influence

Throughout the case studies, the voice of the mother can be heard as she monitors her children's homework. It was often mothers who were making sure that their children were doing their homework, who were the sounding boards when their children read, and who checked and evaluated their children's work and progress. Helen Johnson could have been speaking for most of the mothers in our case study families when she said *If I got paid for every hour I spent at home teaching my kids, I'll be a millionaire.* In those families where the mother did not play a major role in the children's school work, language background may have been a factor. For example, in the Kha and George families, the mothers had limited English language skills and could only be peripherally involved in the children's school work. Sometimes there was a division between the kind of help offered by parents, with mothers helping children with

language and fathers helping children with mathematics. In the Caravaggio family, however, the mother not only helped her children with mathematics assignments, she also went into their school to help the teacher with mathematics lessons. This contrasts with the mothers' more usual role of helping with junior primary reading lessons or helping in the school canteen.

In many families, constructions of gender were an important part of parents' aspirations for their children. In some farming families, the tradition of sons inheriting the family farm appeared dominant although most of the parents were keen for both sons and daughters to obtain further training or tertiary education that would enable them to be mobile in career terms. Across the rural-urban divide, many parents' academic aspirations for boys seemed to be a priority and, in a few families, specific cultural values relating to gender roles were articulated by parents who believed boys needed to work harder at school than girls because the former would eventually become the providers whilst the latter would depend upon marriage as a determinant of their future.

Mothers' and fathers' reading habits tended to be different with mothers' generally reading much more regularly and over a broader range of text types, particularly if they were themselves undertaking further studies. In this way, mothers often provided role models for their daughters' literacy practices. In contrast, fathers and sons were the main users of computers where these were accessible.

Although variation in literacy practices on the basis of gender was not one of our points of focus when gathering the school data, our observations within schools revealed some examples of gender bias in school texts and materials. More importantly, we became aware of gendered procedures in classroom seating arrangements, work groupings and, significantly, differential patterns in teacher interaction with pupils. We believe that, because school literacy practices are embedded within such everyday procedures, they are very likely to express and shape teachers' expectations of different pupils' literacy development.

What Did We Learn About Home and School Literacy Practices?

The most obvious conclusion to emerge from our case studies was that the literacy activities in the nine schools we visited appeared to us to have much more in common than the literacy practices in the twenty-three case study families.

Across the schools, the literacy environments were rich with English print which was used for many purposes. In the homes, there was much less printed material, and what there was depended substantially on differences of culture and values among the families. In the schools, reading was used for a range of familiar educational of purposes: in order to learn to decode print and ascribe meaning, for literary purposes, as a means of learning and for pleasure and entertainment. In the homes, there was a similar range of purposes for reading - for work and study, for pleasure and for religious purposes - but the amount of reading undertaken was unevenly distributed across the families.

Similarly, there was a uniform set of writing practices across the schools, with an emphasis on correct letter formation in the earlier grades and correct spelling and presentation in the later grades. In many schools, teachers focussed on teaching genre structures, often in combination with a process/conferencing approach to writing. In the homes, there was much less writing than we saw at school. What writing there was occurred in relatively few families and was dominated by work, study and contact with relatives. In several families there were examples of school-like formal writing activities and the use of diaries.

An important difference was revealed between home and school literacy practices relating to the electronic media. It appears that the difference may be both a matter of time allocation and actual content focused upon within the various media. There was much more use of television, radio and computers at home than at school. Computer use seemed to be related to family prosperity and education, but tended to serve an entertainment rather than educative function for all children who had access to a computer. Regardless of location, social class and cultural background, many families told us they watched *Neighbours*, *Home and Away*, *A Country Practice*, *Sale of the Century*, *Sesame Street* and *Playschool* as well as various sport, cartoon and news programs.

Homework emerged as *the* pivotal link between the literacy contexts of home and school. For many children there was support and guidance at home and homework sessions were an extension of the school day and the time when parents could play a part in school learning. Homework, in virtually all families, was an event embedded within the routine of evening activities. Most of the older children were expected to take responsibility for this work for themselves, but a definite time and location for the activity had clearly become established. With the younger family members, some parents took advantage of these sessions to become highly involved in structured ritualised learning sessions with their children. Other parents were unable to play a large part personally in this learning, but were able find suitable resources for their children. Some parents were unable to become highly involved in this learning possibly because they had little knowledge of what was happening at school.

School success in literacy is dependent upon a complex combination of home and school issues which may vary from child to child. Doing literacy is deeply embedded in the social practices and relationships of schools and homes. For many of the families in the study, the literacy practices of the home complemented and extended those of the school and their children were coping well with the literacy demands of the latter. For others, the literacy practices of the home were not such a good match with those of the school, yet some of these children were also coping, partly perhaps because the school was providing opportunities for reading and especially for writing which were not available at home. It seemed to be not only the literacy practices that were important, but other variables, such as the degree and kind of parental involvement in their children's education and the attitude of parents to their children's upbringing and futures which appeared to superimpose different values upon doing literacy. It seems likely that such values may be making a difference in children's

perceptions of literacy and, therefore, their own engagement in it. In addition, the progress of the children in the bilingual program suggests that, where educational resources are used to value and extend the culture of the home, children may achieve levels of literacy which would not otherwise have been expected.

Finally, we learned that gender is probably a key variable which has an impact upon literacy practices certainly in the home and probably in the school This variable was not initially identified by us as central to our research agenda but, as the data collection phase unfolded, we were struck by the different roles taken by mothers and fathers in relation to their children's schoolwork and by the relative richness of mothers' literacy practices. Were we planning the study again, we would strongly attempt to explore data within the different social contexts which could reveal the variable influence of gender and, in particular, those procedures, tasks, and texts in the school which may be perpetuating differential expectations and achievement on the basis of gender.

The foregoing summary of similarities and differences of literacy practices relating to community location, language background, social class, and home and school contexts is intended as an overview of the more substantial parts of this report. More detailed interpretations of the case studies in relation to each of these four points of focus are provided in the chapters that follow. The case studies themselves are presented in Volume 2. We end this overview, however, by drawing out certain key conclusions and a number of implications from the research.

Conclusions

The project brief for this study identified four aims:

1. to undertake a number of case studies to investigate the differences in literacy practices between urban and rural communities;

2. to identify influences on children's literacy that occur outside school, taking into account community, cultural socio-economic and language differences;

3. to identify the extent to which children in the different communities seek out sources of literacy including libraries, use of computers, television and reading matter in the home;

4. to consider the influence on children's literacy of educational resources available in schools used by the community and the associated educational practices.

Our case studies spanned twenty-three families and nine schools in six communities. In these communities, there was much more variation among the home literacy practices than the school literacy practices. All of the schools had language rich environments. Significant proportions of the time were spent on reading and writing, and reading and writing were used for a variety of purposes. There was a similar range of purposes for reading and a relatively narrower range of purposes for writing in the homes, but the

amount of reading and writing was unevenly distributed across the families. The extremes of this range included a family where reading and writing were a central part of each day's family activities to a home almost entirely without English printed material. In almost all of the families, parents were involved in helping with homework.

For these communities, urban or rural location was not among the most important influences upon the differences we found in home and school literacy practices. With one or two exceptions, literacy practices in school were remarkably similar in all six communities. Although there was a greater variety of literacy practices across families than within schools, similar patterns of literacy practices are found in both urban and rural families. Among the very few differences we noticed, which may impact upon the value given to literacy, were the social role of the school in rural and remote communities and some familial concerns about the children's future in rural areas.

Bearing in mind the cautions we have raised throughout this report concerning vague or general criteria for social class and language identity, certain social class and language differences seemed to point to greater variation in literacy practices than did the location in which a family resided. There was some evidence of social class differences in home literacy practices. Some of the families of higher socio-economic status seemed to have more of the linguistic, cultural and financial resources which assist students to participate successfully in the literacy activities which schools regard as important. Some of the families of lower socio-economic status had fewer books, fewer school-like strategies for helping with homework, and a less-informed involvement in schools. For some of these families, especially families of recent immigrants, language differences compounded social class effects. We did not observe analogous differences among the schools according to class, location or language background of the parents. The schools, in contrast, were almost uniformly monocultural and monolingual.

Although there were differences among the families according to social class and language background, within each of these categories there was a diversity in the use of libraries, computers, television and reading matter in the home. Children in most families used libraries for school projects. Many of the families borrowed books from libraries, and others bought them from book stores and newsagencies and second-hand book shops. More English-speaking background families and higher socio-economic status families had computers at home. All of the families watched television, and most of them seemed to watch the same narrow range of family dramas, and news and current affairs programs. This overall diversity within families sharing similar social and linguistic profiles, and the fact that there was a smaller set of families of different social and linguistic identity who shared common literacy practices, leads us to remain cautious about drawing firm conclusions about the impact of social class or language background.

Finally, with respect to the fourth aim of the study, the educational resources and literacy practices of the schools in the study did not vary in significant ways from urban to rural communities. The smallest rural schools had fewer books but not fewer books

per student, and they appeared to promote the same set of literacy practices in classrooms as did the urban schools.

Implications of the Study

1. Literacy and Language Loss

The first implication of the study concerns the education of multilingual and bilingual children. Most of the schools in our case study had large numbers of children from multilingual and bilingual families. Most schools had very few literacy resources which reflected this reality. Within 13 of the 23 families studied, a family member was fluent in at least one language other than English. Among the parents, more than fourteen different languages were known, yet it became clear that only a minority of the children in this study were maintaining parental languages.

Within multilingual or bilingual families, parents faced a continuing dilemma about cultural and linguistic choices. Many parents saw English oracy and literacy as the means of attaining a good education, a necessary condition of living in Australia and the path to a particular future. On the other hand, many parents also wanted to avoid the loss of culture which accompanies their children's loss of languages. Only two of our case study schools supported parents' resolution of this dilemma: Blue Creek with its Jaru language and Aboriginal culture program and Radcliffe with its Year 1/2 Khmer-English bilingual program. Even if parents appear satisfied with the prevailing monolingual regime of the school, they may well be acting outside the school to try to limit language loss. Our evidence suggests that this is an uphill task.

The implication here, we believe, is that schools should pay more attention to the dilemma of language loss and develop strategies and approaches to literacy which complement parents' own attempts to maintain their families' linguistic and cultural identities. At the very least, it is a matter of taking practical steps to recognise and value a child's first language even if a bilingual maintenance program may not be viable. If this kind of intervention is not followed through, the significant linguistic resources which presently exist in this country are likely to be irretrievably diminished.

2. Literacy within Children's Communicative Competence

The diversity of home literacy practices confirmed that all the children, regardless of specific language background, are very likely to enter school with different repertoires of language knowledge and use which express their initial communicative competence. The data from the schools confirmed a priority of focus upon Standard Written English from the earliest years. Whilst this focus did not undervalue or displace the established language repertoires of *some* children, it appeared to disregard those of a high proportion of them. This displacement of the linguistic and literacy resources which children bring to school not only discriminates against NESB pupils but also pupils who, for example, speak other dialects of Australian English, whose previous literacy

experiences differ from those valued in the school, or whose culture reflects a strong oral rather than literate tradition.

The implication here is not to question the school's concern with Standard Written English. However, it is possible that displacement of some children's initial competence may actually lead to failure in both the development of Standard Written English and in the literacy demands of schooling. Our second implication, therefore, is that it remains to be discovered how school literacy practices can positively build upon the diversity of its pupils' early language and literacy experiences with the aims of supporting this diversity while also providing opportunities for all children to develop literacy in Standard Written English.

3. The Meaning of Literacy in Different Settings

The third implication of this study concerns the phenomenology of literacy practices. Even when families' literacy practices appear similar, closer observation shows that the same literacy practices may have different *meanings and value* in different families. This was most obvious in the case of parents' help with homework. On one level, in virtually all of our case study families, parents provided children with help with their homework. The range of ways in which this help was provided, however, indicates that the practice of helping with homework has many different meanings. In some families parents became highly involved in homework and followed school-like practices such as paired reading or assisting children to scaffold the arguments in essays and projects. Other parents participated in reading or homework sessions which focussed less on learning and more on the mere completion of a task the teacher had set.

A similar conclusion can be drawn about school literacy practices. Although the range of practices appeared to us consistent across the schools, the meaning of some of the practices varied from one classroom to the next and, crucially, children interpreted these tasks in different ways. Children are therefore inclined to differentially interpret the purposes and significance of homework. Literacy practices, as James Gee has said, are "always and everywhere integrated with and relative to social practices" (Gee, 1990, p. xix). For some parents, homework is about getting finished something required by the school; for other parents it is an opportunity to ensure that children become familiar with the deeper discourse practices that enable school success.

The consequence of this observation is that, when schools set homework or send home reading, they should pay more attention to the way in which homework is interpreted by pupils in relation to their family's understanding of the social event of doing homework. In other words, teachers could consider homework as an activity which is embedded within an established routine of family procedures which superimpose particular value and meanings. Such value and meanings are likely to shape parental involvement with the child's work and the child's own engagement in it.

4. Computer and Television Literacy

Data from the families revealed differential access to, and use of computers and television. With few exceptions, these media were used for personal entertainment within a relatively narrow range of experience; games on computers and popular dramas on television. Although we were able to observe a good range of lessons in the nine schools with which we had contact, the high emphasis on written language markedly contrasted with the minimal use of the electronic media.

It is a truism that both these media have tremendous educative potential whilst, as our study suggests, this potential is only partially exploited in the home - as exemplified by family discussion about television programs - and it appears not to be exploited to any great extent within the school. The present generation of school age children are entering an era in which the critical interpretation of television and the capacity to create and interact with computerised information will be attributes of the literate person. Our fourth implication, therefore, is that schools will need to address literacy in the electronic media in the coming time with the same energy in the later primary years and secondary years that is currently directed towards written literacy in the early years.

5. Gender and Literacy Practices

From our research, it is hard to resist the conclusion that home literacy practices are gendered. This discovery supports our view that literacy is strongly integrated within broader family practices and values. Our finding here may reflect the particular sample of families with whom we worked, but it is clear that the interaction of gendered values and practices with the development of literacy in the home is worthy of much closer study in the future.

Investigations into the role of gender in school literacy have, to date, largely explored the nature of school texts and materials. There is some evidence in the present study, however, that classroom procedures and teacher-pupil interaction may also be gendered and, as these provide the frame within which school literacy is undertaken, it is possible that differential achievements in literacy development may be traceable to gendered expectations and practices in the school. Again, the implication is that this issue requires further research which will need to be appropriately sensitive to the special culture of the classroom.

6. The Meaning of Social Variation

The sixth implication of the study concerns the use of sociological categories by teachers and policy makers. What we discovered in this study is in some ways a consequence of our research method. There is no doubt that our adoption of a case study approach to literacy practices uncovered richer veins of data than would have been revealed through more conventional methods of investigation. It may be that the contextual significance of literacy and the meanings and values attributed to literacy

practices by both families and schools can only be investigated through this kind of research.

Case study field work, as Bob Connell has pointed out, is at odds with the structuralist social research tradition. As he says, "However well or ill you do your fieldwork, there is no way you can escape the faces and accents of particular people." (Connell, 1983, p. 225). It is therefore not surprising that our research has led us to be sceptical of the usefulness of broad categorisations such as urban or rural location, socio-economic status or non English-speaking background. We approached people through these category systems but, when we were invited into their homes, what impressed us most was their concern for their children's futures regardless of where they lived or their origins and identity.

Although we have found some evidence of social class and language background differences in home literacy practices, this evidence is far less regular than structuralist social science would predict. Family literacy practices are *embedded within* a pattern of class relations and other social practices which open up or close down educational possibilities for individual children. School success is harder to achieve for children in families disadvantaged by poverty, who have literacy experiences that are different from those valued at school, or have a linguistic and cultural identity different from their teachers. Similarly, non-English speaking background is *part of* a pattern of language variation which opens up or closes down educational possibilities for individual families. But it seems to us misleading to regard these differences as a realisation of a monolithic class-based or language-based deficit for all working class children or non-English speaking background children.

The implication of this observation, we suggest, is that teachers and policy makers *and* researchers should be more cautious in their perceptions of social difference. As this study has revealed, there is a wide range of both similar and distinctive literacy practices among the members of *any* sociological category - urban or rural, working class or middle class, NESB or ESB. All school populations are heterogeneous to varying extents, with children from families with a diversity of aspirations, language backgrounds and literacy practices. Despite our conclusion that literacy practices appeared similar within the classrooms of all the schools in this study, it also emerged that children were differentially interpreting tasks and experiences in school. The practical question here is: how to accommodate diversity in children's literacy experiences and in the familial meanings and values that shape these experiences while, at the same time, building upon these to provide a foundation for life long literacy in its broadest sense for *all* children.

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CHAPTER 2
DOING CASE STUDIES

Mari Rhydwen

Introduction

In this chapter I shall be describing the methodologies that we used for investigating Literacy Practices in Urban and Rural Communities. I use the plural 'methodologies' deliberately since the data collection for the project was carried out by a team of seven people and, as I shall argue, each investigator works from his or her own ideology. Although, as Dorothy Smith (1990, p.32) writes, 'Established sociology uses the concept of ideology as a category to express the deviant inverse of an objective inquiry or an objective account,' she goes on to define ideology stating that it 'will identify for us practices that design how actualities are inscribed in the texts of sociological discourse.' Each one of us is involved in such practices and hence affect how we inscribe our texts. To begin with however I shall describe the methodology prescribed in the project brief.

The aims of the project Literacy Practices in Urban and Rural Communities were set out by DEET in their project brief. The methodology was subsumed under the first aim: to "undertake a number of case studies to investigate the differences in literacy practices between urban and rural communities." The brief continued by stating that it was expected that the case studies would be as representative as possible of different kinds of community, family background, culture as well as "socio-economic status, homelessness and unemployment." Other aims of the project were to identify influences on children's literacy that occur outside school, identify the extent to which children in the different communities seek out sources of literacy and to consider the influence on children's literacy of educational resources available in schools used by the community and the associated educational practices.

These aims are further explored in the subsequent chapters. Here I shall examine only some of our experiences in utilising the methodology; namely conducting case studies to fulfil the aims.

Why case studies?

In the project brief, DEET referred to a number of studies on the relationship between culture and education. Shirley Brice-Heath's *Ways with Words* (1983) and John Ogbu's work are referred to specifically. I can only infer that such works based upon

case studies or, to be more precise, ethnography, were viewed as models for the project. It should be noted from the outset that the ethnographic data on which *Ways with Words* was based, was done over a period of nine years and that Ogbu's *The Next Generation* (1974) was written after the author had spent twenty one months collecting data, during sixteen of which he lived on-site. This contrasts with, for example, the thirty-five days I spent in Countrytown collecting data for eight families. Whilst the short time-scale of the project precluded it's being one of great depth, the range of families and communities which we were able to investigate has allowed us to realise and document the extensive variation in Australian families, to point the way to areas which warrant further investigation, and to reach some conclusions which are documented in the later issues chapters.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of doing case studies was the extent to which they revealed a richness and complexity not normally captured by large scale surveys. This became immediately apparent as the team made initial contact with families and found that they frequently did not meet the demographic criteria by which we had attempted to select them. Whilst this could have been a source of frustration, we found it reassuring that families do not, in fact, fit neatly into categories 'low socio-economic status' or 'English-speaking background' constructed by sociological theorists. Whilst this study is not, and could not be, an Australian *Ways with Words*, since case studies do not produce the same kinds of data as in-depth ethnographic research, the use of case studies raises the kinds of questions that are erased by some sociological methods. Such issues are at the crux of the crisis in current theory and Brice-Heath herself foreshadowed the impossibility of her work being used as a model saying that the conditions which allowed her to conduct such work are no longer extant (1983, p.7).

Two points need to be made about this issue as it relates to how we have constructed our text. First, although debate about the implications of not only embodying but making explicit in our writing differing ideologies has not been the focus of this project, it must be - and has been - an issue in a multi-authored sociological text. Although we have conformed to some extent in the presentation of our data, it will be seen that there are differences between them that have precluded complete uniformity. Secondly, whilst the significance of theoretical debate about what Clifford terms the 'pervasive postcolonial crisis of ethnographic authority' (1988, p.8) varies between team members, none has been untouched by questions about how we have constructed others through our texts. This relation between the experience of our data-gathering method and the text we have constructed will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter.

How we found participants: 'Are two 4WDs high enough for you?'

The project team at Edith Cowan University nominated the eight communities where case studies would be undertaken in their application for the project. Half the

communities were to be rural, the other half urban, and would be representative of the following categories:

1. Non-English-speaking background (NESB), Low socio-economic status (SES)
2. NESB High SES
3. ESB Low SES
4. ESB High SES.

In the initial phase of the research, the team agreed on the following framework for data collection:

A cycle of data collection in each family

Family literacy practice data will be collected using a series of interviews and observations of family activities, conducted over several months.

In addition to the interview and observation data collected by the researcher, an account of family literacy practices will be collected from the alternative perspective of one 10-13 year old member of each family. This key participant will be interviewed intensively, perhaps once a day for a week, about the literacy practices in his or her family. The interviews may take place at school or in some other location. The interviews will be taped, and ethnographic field notes of each interview will be prepared. The interview tapes will be used to provide verbatim quotations for the field notes.

With the permission of the family, each child will be provided with a micro-cassette recorder and invited to collect some tapes of the literacy practices of his or her family. These tapes will be selectively transcribed in order to produce detailed narrative descriptions of a small and representative group of literacy practices for each family.

A cycle of data collection in each school and community

School literacy practice data will be collected in the classroom of one or two children in each of the families. With the permission of the schools, data collected will include:

- a narrative description of one school day for each of one or two children in each family
- a narrative description of one non-school day for each of one or two children in each family
- a catalogue of texts in use in the children's classrooms; and
- a narrative description of at least one school morning, including a language lesson in which the children are participants.

It will be seen from a reading of the case studies themselves that, in general, our data collecting conformed to this framework. Naturally, modifications were made in response to the situations we encountered. For example, taping of family literacy practices often became a family activity and interviews with children often obeyed the law of diminishing returns so that daily interviews became superfluous. Since it had been decided that the school days of two children, including on 10-13 year old, in each family would be described, we had to find families with at least two children within a prescribed age range.

By the time I joined the research team, a country town in the south of WA had been selected as one of the rural locations for the study and I undertook to carry out eight case studies there. I hoped to work with families representing all four categories listed earlier. To this end, I approached the principals of both schools in the town, one of which was a PSP school, in order to find suitable families to participate in the study. Since we planned to spend time in the classroom with children from the families involved and since we were working under severe time-constraints, enlisting the help of school principals and teachers seemed the most practical way, in some cases the only possible way. All but one of the team members made initial contact with families through the schools. This did not result in our being allocated 'model' families. In one case a family was in open dispute with the school and subsequently withdrew the child from it. We needed to find families who not only fitted the criteria outlined above but who had one child in year 6 or 7 as well as another child or children in pre-primary or high school. When I approached the principal it emerged, as it did for other team members, that there were generally few families to choose from. For instance, in any year 7 class there would often be only one or two children with siblings from families that were, say, NESB.

So far as socio-economic status was concerned, finding families who fitted the criteria was more problematic. In urban areas the solution was to select school for which the catchment area was predominantly that of people of a particular income level. In Countrytown it was more difficult. The public primary schools in the town seemed to have reputations for being associated with different socio-economic groups, the popular perception being that Highglen was more middle class. This is partly because it is located in a predominantly middle class section of town, except for some Aboriginal housing. Most of the children from the Aboriginal housing estate attend Countrytown Primary, however. On the other hand, it seemed that both schools had pupils representative of all social groups and Highglen has been allocated PSP status from 1994. From my own experience of being raised in a country town, my hunch is that class relations in Countrytown are far more subtle than is possible to ascertain from a brief study of this kind.

For the purposes of the study I have nominally allocated families to a socio-economic category on the basis of school attended. It should be noted that this does not necessarily reflect the situation accurately. When I spoke to the principal of Highglen about families I specifically asked if there were any of higher socio-economic status, since I wanted to ensure that at least some of the families I worked with were perceived

as being in that category. He told me that I 'had it wrong' and that socio-economic status was not related to parental commitment, asking whether a family with two 4WDs was high enough for me. I hasten to add that I reassured him that I had not been making assumptions about the relation between status and parental commitment but was merely trying to ensure a spread of socio-economic groups were represented in my work.

The main point, which is reiterated throughout this report, is that a conceptual category such as socio-economic status is problematic, not least as a basis for identifying groups of people as a focus for research. It will be apparent from the case studies that, in the absence of knowledge about the families' actual economic status, many factors - such as obvious evidence of consumption, relative status within an ethnic group, level of education and aspirations - revealed a complex interplay of circumstances that renders the category relating to socio-economic status ambiguous.

Another category that proved problematic was that of language background. My data indicate that language shift/loss is so rapid that, in families where both parents speak or spoke a language other than English as a first language, English is likely to be the one used predominantly at home so that within a generation, families that are NESB become ESB. Thus, several of my ESB families would have been NESB had the study been conducted with the previous generation.

We deliberately included the term 'background' since we anticipated that, in limiting ourselves to 'English and non-English speaking', we would exclude families that were in a process of change. Is a family in which some members speak predominantly a language other than English and others English, 'English-speaking' or not? Is a family in which a non-standard dialect of English that signifies identity English-speaking? To circumvent answering such questions which are matters of debate, we used 'background'. As it turned out, in my own study, two families who were English-speaking were of non English-speaking background. In one case, in a family which the school principal had identified for me as English-speaking background, all four grandparents were non-English speaking and one parent had a language other than English as her first language. Both parents spoke unaccented Standard Australian English.

In concluding this section, I wish to emphasise that, whilst we attempted to find families representative of different socio-economic and language categories, in fact we found that actual families are, in many cases, difficult to categorise. This has implications for the relationships between education and status and education and language. These issues are elaborated in subsequent chapters. It also has implications for further research and it is this topic I shall now address.

How we failed to find participants.

It will be seen from the case studies that none of the families are representative of the most impoverished or the most wealthy sections of society. Moreover, in the

experience of the team, the most difficult groups to gain access to were newly arrived migrants and Aboriginal people of low socio-economic status. Louden has said that, in his work with a Cambodian family, he felt uncomfortable. He attributed this in part to the difference in social status between the translator and the family members as well as to the fact that, as a middle-class white male, he was not in the best position to elicit frank responses from an uneducated Cambodian woman.

I have experienced the same discomfort working with some Aboriginal people and members of other disadvantaged groups. In Countrytown I was unable to find any Aboriginal families with children at Countrytown Primary School who were willing to participate in the project. Work with Aboriginal people in the north of WA was impeded by the difficulty of finding a researcher, appropriate to the task, who was available and willing to undertake the kind of case study we aimed for. In particular, we were aware of the difficulties of using interview techniques with Aboriginal people in a short-term study of this kind and it is important to note that, in the case study which is included in the report, the researcher was able to collect data primarily because she had a long-standing relationship with the participants.

It is common for studies involving people from ethnic/cultural groups, other than that of the researcher, to use techniques that are different from those employed in this study. It is such differences that, in part, have traditionally defined the disciplines of anthropology and sociology. In most cases it is necessary for the researcher of people from a different cultural background to learn to communicate in the language of the people under investigation. Similarly, in working with people from marginalised groups, research is often viable only if certain conditions are met. The researcher must be seen to be at least impartial if not committed to the values of the group and, in a study of this length and kind, it is usually not possible to establish the trusting relationship this entails. Whilst, for obvious reasons, we cannot be sure why some groups were inaccessible, it is possible to make informed guesses based on previous experience.

People who, for whatever reason, distrust, dislike or fear those in authority are unlikely to want to answer questions from anyone who may, rightly or wrongly, be seen to be in a position of authority unless there are obvious incentives to do so. Although I would not presume to speak for the Aboriginal families who were approached but refused to participate in the project, I have some information which offers clues as to possible reasons for this. First, there is the increasing tendency for Aboriginal people to resist involvement in research that is not generated by Aboriginal people or organisations. Secondly, some Aboriginal people in the community suggested that, had the research addressed issues that were clearly of immediate relevance to them, there might have been more willingness to participate. Thirdly, and in my view a more compelling reason, was the tension in Countrytown between the white and Aboriginal community. It is at this point that I feel constrained by some aspects of the methodology we adopted in that I was necessarily seen as associated with the schools since I had made initial contacts through them. Moreover I spent a great deal of time there attending classroom lessons. In my previous work with Aboriginal people in the

NT, I made a deliberate point of not mixing with non-Aboriginal people more than necessary to the extent that I frequented 'black' hotels and cafes in townships and lived away from 'white camps' in remote communities. I do not know if such behaviour would even be possible in Countrytown but, in view of the hints of racism I encountered in many of my dealings with non-Aboriginal people there, I suspect it would be difficult for anyone to do research with much of the Aboriginal population without establishing clearly his or her ideological and possibly racial credentials.

On the other hand I do not wish to imply that Aboriginal people are peculiarly intransigent in their attitudes to researchers. Christine Obbo has described her experience of asking senior students of fieldwork methods to study local events, including ones on-campus. She describes the increasingly aggressive teasing at the hands of her fellow anthropologists when they feared she was studying them. (1992, p.300). Case study methodology, whilst it may reveal much about participants, has it's shortcomings, the main one being that only people who are willing to participate will do so.

Representation

One of the problems with doing case study research, ethnography, is how to represent the other; the 'object' of our research. Our transcription methods, for example, act as a filter on our data as do our interviewing techniques.

Because of our wish to cover a good range of families within a constrained timescale, seven of us were involved in data collection and transcription. We decided early on that, although we would seek similar data in our interviews (such as information on home literacy, the use of libraries and electronic media, familial aspirations, etc.), the nature of the information we were seeking precluded complete uniformity. Similarly, we decided to write up our data in our own way. It should be noted that, although we all shared an interest in literacy, we came from a variety of disciplines which naturally influenced our views. For example, my case studies, in the Countrytown chapter, are a little different in format from those elsewhere in this report. Much of the narrative is direct quotation from interviews as fluency was my priority.

In the case studies written by other researchers, the text is interspersed with quotations from interviewees. All of us occasionally provide sections of talk with speakers being named line by line and all of us edited out as far as possible the usual hesitations, digressions, and repetitions that typify conversation. We decided to maintain the differences in form that emerged as a natural consequence of working individually at different times in different locations, since they reflect our commitment to enabling the voices of researcher or researched to maintain their integrity. Dorothy Smith, in *The Conceptual Practices of Power*, discusses at length the relationship between the direct experience of the practitioner of sociology and sociological analysis. Suffice here to say that, as a team of researchers working on a project which involved each of us in the task of representing several other people, we were highly conscious of the fact that 'The persistence of the privileged sociological version (or versions) relies upon a

substructure that has already discredited and deprived of authority to speak the voices of those who know the society differently.' (Smith, 1990, p.24). The fact that we were unable to include members of certain sections of the community in this study is acknowledged. Our awareness of this is formally acknowledged in our study by our refusal to compound sociology's original sin by ourselves denying anyone of the 'authority to speak.' Not only did this mean that we, the researchers, wrote as we chose, but that we made every possible effort to allow those we researched to comment on and edit the texts concerning them prior to completion and inclusion in the Report.

Ethics and blandness

Every family and every teacher was invited to comment on the section of the report relating to him/her. All the names of individual people as well as schools, suburbs and towns (except for Perth itself which is rather too large to hide) are pseudonyms. In most cases people were happy with what had been written. In some cases, slight changes were made. A small example was the response of some interviewees to one researcher who had transcribed their speech using 'yeah' and 'yep'. The interviewee asserted that 'we sound too countryish'. The script was edited in accordance with such a concern.

A larger issue was that of knowing more than we could disclose. In some cases, members of families disclosed information 'off record' about their family relationships, which we believed could well be making an impact on language use, literacy practices or school performance. In these cases ethical considerations have precluded us from disclosure and consequently we are acutely conscious of the incompleteness of some case studies. This is not, however, a methodological flaw. We are simply acknowledging that case studies can only ever be part of a story. Whilst, in some cases, we have information that has not been disclosed, in every case there is bound to be information to which we have no access. This was perhaps most apparent in the case of days in schools which, as one researcher said, were merely 'like snapshots'. Another day the picture could have been different. In cases where an interpreter was necessary, another element was involved which filtered information. We had no way of knowing the extent or the nature of this effect. Of course family members were, from the outset, free to influence what kinds of information were available to us; the children who made tape recordings for us chose what to record.

A consequence of our commitment to respecting the wishes of interviewees and conforming to institutional and personal ethical requirements may result in our study seeming rather bland to some readers compared with some other published case studies. The time when the social scientist could claim a privileged status based upon the myth of 'objective observer' is passing in the context of feminist and non-Western challenges to the researcher:

> Any investigator who claims to be merely "recording facts" [thereby] deludes himself, for the Great Master has said it: "*Only laws and generalizations are scientific facts*, and fieldwork generally consists only and exclusively in the

> preparation of the chaotic reality, in subordinating it to general rules." "Discourse," "law," "order," "generalizations," "consistency" — what he values and looks for is, fortunately, what he always finds.
>
> (Trinh T. Minh-ha 1989, p.56.)

The renunciation of privileged status bestows its own rewards. Our consciousness that we were not "merely 'recording facts'" allowed us to notice and acknowledge 'chaotic reality'. Elsewhere in this study is evidence of the contrast our study revealed between 'chaotic reality' and the sociological generalizations such as that even contained within the title of the project brief.

Good things and endings

In case it should seem that our methodological (self) analysis emasculated our study, reducing what could have been a clinical analysis of urban and rural literacy practices through 'laws and generalizations' to a chaotic collection of stories, I shall now foreshadow some of our achievements which are discussed in more depth in later chapters.

Although we worked with only twenty three families and cannot claim that our sample is, in the usual way, representative of the Australian population as a whole, we have been overwhelmed by the richness of our data. Despite the fact that we spent hours, rather than days or weeks, with each family, we have far more data than we could possibly use. Whilst we have drawn heavily on transcribed interviews to inform our narrative accounts of the families and their literacy practices, we have only begun to explore the wealth of other information this has given us. For example, although gender issues were outside our brief, they permeated our data. Issues, such as the complex relationship between ethnicity, gender, power and identity, to which a detailed discourse analysis of family interviews could contribute, lie far beyond the immediate scope and requirements of this study. The fact that our data collection methods alerted us to such complexity has rescued us from assuming that the impact of the relation between such factors is negligible. To give a concrete example: one of the families interviewed I would have to define, if forced, as low socio-economic status (according to criteria such as education, current income, aspirations), non-English speaking background and rural (again, according to several criteria). Yet all the children in the family, of the age to be having higher education, attend university. Moreover, one parent is non-literate in any language. Whilst this study cannot account for why the family confounds stereotypical assumptions, I believe that the chaotic non-conformity to sociologically-based assumptions that our study has revealed is a source of optimism rather than disappointment.

An unexpected outcome of our study was the extent to which religious practices and literacy practices were intertwined. Whilst the relationship between religion and literacy are well-documented (Ong 1982, Hvalkof and Aaby 1981) it was nevertheless a surprise to us to find this influence in our small sample. It is particularly interesting because it was unpredicted and, to our knowledge, the influence of religious practice on

literacy in contemporary Australia has not been studied and we believe it could be the basis of further investigation. There is, of course, the possibility that people who are religious are more inclined to participate in research projects, but even this would have interesting and widespread implications.

We should mention the experience of doing casework itself. Although researchers sometimes felt uncomfortable, our dominant experience was of pleasure at how much people were prepared to cooperate and reveal themselves to our scrutiny. Whilst some interviewees were initially apprehensive about the use of tape recorders, most talked freely. Despite pressure of work or family commitments they welcomed us into their homes and answered our questions. Teachers allowed us to sit in their classrooms and describe their activities. In one case, a teacher I had worked with said that, had she known what I was doing, she would have been unwilling to let me in but she said that I could use the material nonetheless. In all other cases the teachers were positive about my accounts of the classroom activities, one laughing about a not entirely flattering portrayal and saying it was 'fair enough'.

Whilst it imposes certain restrictions, and not a little anxiety, to show people what one has written about them, I found it was an aspect of methodology that substantially enhanced theory. Whatever its failings, this study may have shown that it is possible to aspire to jointly constructed texts in which the voices of the participants, as well as the different researchers, can be heard. Whilst it would be naive to suppose that such factors as unequal power relations do not influence some participants' willingness to criticise texts written by researchers, it is not insignificant that all the case studies have been approved by the participants involved.

My previous research has been with Aboriginal people and, in that context, I had been acutely conscious of the ethical-cum-theoretical implications of representing 'the Other'. This study, in which I have worked with people, some of whom shared my ethnicity, gender and culture, has alerted me to the extent to which all discourse of this kind is a construction of others. Whenever we write about people, no matter how carefully or sympathetically, we also construct them. I hope that this study will be noticed by readers whose policy or practice as educators is often influenced by the kinds of categories we have tried to explore. It is very easy for the most well-meaning of teachers to assume, for example, that social class or ethnic affiliation will have some predictable effect on school performance. What this study indicates is not that social class or ethnic affiliation may not have a relation to school performance but that our construction of such categories is problematic. Though we selected people as participants on the basis of categorical criteria, their life experiences often make all too apparent the gap between theoretical construction and reality This not an argument for reassigning or redefining categories but for maintaining a critical awareness of the process of categorisation. The argument arises directly from the practice of ensuring that those who are written about, and thereby constructed, are invited to scrutinise and comment upon the researchers' constructions. I am not claiming that this form of construction ensures a more accurate representation. But, when 'the other' also

becomes 'the reader', a subtle shift in the literacy practice of doing research has occured.

Finally, I hope that our efforts to uncover 'chaotic reality' in how we have created this project report will signal to readers the value of qualitative research of this kind. In our discussions, a recurring theme was the extent of our discoveries through the experience of doing case studies. Whilst it was, at times, frustrating to find that our carefully constructed framework did fit our material ('My family isn't really urban!'), it was satisfying and, I believe, reassuring to have such evidence that people cannot, after all, be easily contained.

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CHAPTER 3
LITERACY PRACTICES IN URBAN AND RURAL COMMUNITIES

Judith Rivalland

Introduction

In his cross-cultural study of reading literacy across thirty-two school systems, Elley (1992) states:

> Traditionally, urban students have had many educational advantages not enjoyed by their rural counterparts. Schools typically have better resources in the cities, better qualified teachers prefer to live in cities, and more cultural amenities are usually available for students (p63).

The National Board of Employment Education and Training report *Equity Outcomes* (1993) investigated educational outcomes related to regional differences within Melbourne. In this report it was claimed:

> Change in student outcomes cannot be measured adequately simply by State and Territory aggregates (e.g. retention rates). These may - and, in fact, do - mask major regional differences which are already the object of public policy (e.g. the Country Areas Program). To report only a State aggregate, such as retention, is equivalent to reporting only the mean in a distribution of scores, without any measure of dispersion. (p8).

In 1993, the Ministry of Education in Western Australia, Monitoring Standards in Education Project, *A Comparison of Student Performance in Metropolitan, Rural and Remote Western Australian Government Schools*, analysed reading and writing performance on the basis of school size and location; metropolitan, rural or remote. Samples were drawn randomly from Year 3, 7 and 10, representing approximately ten per cent of the student population in each of the target years. For writing in Years 3 and 7, students in Rural schools outperformed students in both Metropolitan and Remote schools. In Year 10 this trend was reversed with metropolitan students performing better than rural and remote students. For reading, there were no significant differences between the performances of students in each of the three school locations. Regardless of school location the performance of non-Aboriginal students was significantly higher than for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in all areas of literacy. However, the report warns of the dangers of drawing erroneous conclusions from simple comparisons, since the issue is a complex one made up of many variables. An hierarchical Linear Modelling analysis of the results suggested that

schools accounted for 13 to 27 per cent of variance in performance, whilst other variables accounted for 73 to 88 per cent of variance.

It appears timely then, that this particular ALLP project has enabled us to look in more depth at the complexity of issues which influence literacy practices amongst twenty three urban and rural communities and their associated schools. Conducting case study research of this nature has enabled us to uncover what is not revealed by large scale statistical research. The opportunity to meet with and interview a range of families immediately takes the researcher out of the field of generality into the complexities of family life. Such complexities reveal the intricacies of literacy development and the social practices and social relationships within which this development is embedded.

Rural Locations

Given the focus upon urban and rural literacy and the design of the study, we attempted to include a number of rural communities which would include a range of school sizes. The Western Australian Education Department classifies all schools below 300 students as small schools. Countrytown has a population of 4,138 people and is located about three and a half hours from Perth. Countrytown Primary has 291 students, Highglen Primary 214 students, and St Andrew's 155 students. Yabby Creek, located approximately four and a half hours drive from Perth, has a population of 127. The school is small and more remote; it has 73 students with four classrooms. However, it is worth noting, whilst Yabby Creek is a distant community in the Western Australian context, it would not be considered remote. We originally intended to make a more extensive study of a remote Aboriginal community. However, access difficulties made this impossible. Only one remote Aboriginal family, from the Blue Creek community, has been included in the study. In all, we studied eleven rural families from three different communities whose children attended five different small or remote primary schools. Although there is a range of locations which provide a rich source of information about literacy practices, these communities are unlikely to be representative of rural Western Australia as a whole.

Library Resources in the Community and School

Countrytown

The Countrytown public library has 1,722 fiction books, 2,550 non-fiction and 2,118 junior books. It has a video collection of 65 (mostly non-fiction). The fiction and non-fiction books are heavily used, along with the 8 sets of encyclopedias and videos. There are two collections of 20 books each, of Malay and Italian texts. These are not heavily used.

Countrytown and Highglen primary have similar library resources. Approximately 2,300 fiction books and 2,300 non-fiction. The fiction and non-fiction books have regular use. There are no books in languages other than English.

Yabby Creek

The Yabby Creek Shire Library caters mainly for adults as it has a well equipped school library. It has 276 fiction and 415 non-fiction books all used regularly. A number of books on health and medicine get used very regularly, and the collection of videos (38) and cassette tapes are also used very regularly. The community is situated 60 km from a much larger Shire Library in Countrytown.

The Yabby Creek primary school library has 1300 fiction and 1400 non-fiction books, as well as a good collection of reference materials. It has one BBC computer and 3 Apple Macintosh computers.

Blue Creek

Facilities reasonably closely available to the people who live in Blue Creek include a local (independent) newspaper produced in nearby Remotetown and a couple of video-tape borrowing outlets (machines are also available for hire). There is also a library service and a tourist information centre run by the shire. There is a Ministry high school which caters for pre-primary to year 12 students and a pre-school provided by Frontier services, a division of the Uniting Church.

There is a local Language Resource Centre set up to promote Aboriginal languages in the region with a literature production unit where workers are trained in graphics and layout for computer desk-top publishing. The centre itself houses a couple of collections of audio-tapes recording oral history of the region, video-tapes and books for sale or loan. The Centre's staff pointed out the popularity of newly published dictionaries in local languages (Walmajarri, Kukatja, Jaru, Bardi and Worrorra) and nature type books with colour plates are popular with old and young.

In Jaji School, each classroom has television and video facilities and the middle class have computers. Although there is no financial provision for this the school has a small library collection organised by a visiting teacher-librarian. Other resources are available to all teachers/schools in the region through a regional centre run by Catholic Education. At the centre there is a heavy emphasis on culturally appropriate materials for the region, many are suitable TESOL type resources and a large section is devoted to the broad area of Aboriginal studies. Two similar Ministry centres have similar material for loan by all teachers.

Students have access both to the school library and to the shire library to borrow books which are then kept at school until returned. Children in the infants class appear to prefer nature books -usually illustrated with large colour photos: e.g. *Jilji*, the great sandy desert and bush food books. *Djawal Idi*, a, magazine for Aboriginal students is

also very popular as are the Ashton Scholastic stories. For classroom reading the small shoebox stories are very popular with younger students, perhaps because easily mastered and owned. The small size also seems important. The infants teacher emphasized that her students have a great love for books of all kinds.

Windsor Park in the City

Windsor Park community members also have access to a number of public libraries. The largest of these has 8,500 adult fiction, 3,000 junior fiction books, 12,000 adult non-fiction, 4,000 junior non-fiction, a range of reference books, 1,000 videos and 1,000 music cassettes. The library facilities are all used very regularly.

The following books in other languages are available: Greek (40), Vietnamese (15), Dutch (40), French (40), German (40), Italian (40), Spanish (30), Japanese (15), and Turkish (40). The foreign language books receive moderate usage.

Windsor Park Primary School has 2,506 fiction, 2,783 non-fiction, 554 teacher reference, 85 reference books and 10 foreign language books. The school has 10 IBM computers and 8 BBC computers.

Redlands in the City

The local library has 6,477 fiction and 10,305 non-fiction books, all receive high frequency usage. All reference books, videos and newspapers also receive very regular usage. There is a high demand for Vietnamese, Chinese, Polish, Spanish and Serbo-Croation books, which get well used. Storytelling is held in the library every Wednesday and the child care centre make regular weekly visits to the library. At another nearby library, Russian, German, Polish, Czech, Hungarian, Macedonian and Portuguese books are available.

The primary school has 3,547 fiction, 4,366 non-fiction books and 12 computers. The following foreign language books are available: 4 Vietnamese, 2 Greek, 2 Italian and 1 Chinese.

Radcliffe in the City

The community at Radcliffe have access to a number of local libraries. The largest of these is a well equipped library. It has 6,967 fiction books, 5,163 non-fiction, 5,358 junior fiction and 2,318 reference books, all used very regularly. This same library has 153 multi-language resource magazines or newspapers.

Given the above data, there does appear to be a difference between library resources available to students in the communities of this study. Yabby Creek, Countrytown and Blue Creek appear to have fewer resources available to them. However, given the population of these communities the resources though limited, are not totally inadequate. In Countrytown and Yabby Creek the families in this study appear to

compensate for the lack of resources, by swapping books at the book exchange, purchasing books from second-hand sales, participating in school book sales and purchasing books whenever they visit larger communities. Apart, perhaps, from Blue Creek, the non-English speaking communities particularly in Countrytown do not seem to be well catered for.

A Matter of Definition

We began from the premise that literacy practices go on around texts (written, spoken, visual, dramatic and media) when some form of transformation takes place between semiotic systems. We also acknowledged that literacy is social practice and is therefore learned as part of wider social practices and processes in which we are engaged as we become members of our families and communities. That is, we learn to 'do' literacy as we learn how to behave and belong in our families and communities. We saw literacy as a set of practices which sit within the social practices in which people participate in their daily lives, both constructed by and constructive of the use of language at home and school.

With the above understandings of literacy practices, we set out to meet the families identified in the different categories of our study. As soon as we met our families it became apparent that our categories of rural and urban locations were problematic. In designing the study we had assumed that the parents in the families living in a specific geographic location would have been socialised in that particular geographic location and therefore developed their own literacy practices within that community. That is, the parents of the families in Countrytown, Yabby Creek and Blue Creek would have grown up, been educated and lived in those locations for most of their lives. We similarly took for granted the assumption that the parents in urban communities had been socialised in urban communities. However, when we looked more closely this assumption proved naive.

Among families categorised 'urban', there were four families in which the parents had been socialised and educated in a rural location: Bill and Anne O'Leary (Windsor Park) were both educated in small rural schools, one in Eastern Australia and the other in Western Australia, Mr & Mrs Ling (Windsor Park) were born and educated to Year 10 on Christmas Island, a rural community with a District High School. Mr & Mrs Kuhn and Mr & Mrs Kha all grew up in rural Cambodia and were farmers prior to living in Thai border camps and later moving to Australia. In four of the families categorised as 'rural' at least one partner was socialised and educated in an urban setting. Anne Caravaggio (Countrytown) moved from Holland to Perth when she was 9 years old, she completed her schooling and tertiary education in Perth. John Caravaggio was born in a rural town, but completed his secondary and tertiary education in Perth. Linda Hooper (Countrytown) grew up in Perth, where she completed her schooling and a short training course run by the Pharmacy Guild. Bruce Hooper grew up in Countrytown where he completed four years of high school. Helen Johnson (Yabby Creek) grew up in Perth, where she completed her secondary education and began

medical school which she did not complete. Liam Johnson grew up in Yabby Creek where he attended the one-classroom primary school. He completed Year 11 in Sunny town and then worked in an accountancy office before returning to Yabby Creek. Bridgit Kelly grew up in Countrytown but lived in Perth for a number of years where she trained and worked as a nurse. Mr Kelly grew up and was educated in Perth.

The geographic location of the socialisation background of the parents appears to be significant, since we had decided to investigate literacy practices as they are shaped by the social practices of different communities. If parental socialisation has taken place in different geographic locations and social communities, the social practices from those different geographic locations are likely to continue playing a role in the shaping of current social and literacy practices in new geographic locations. The study might have been designed differently to account for the location of parental socialisation processes. The mobility of people within Australia constructs different patterns of urban and rural living, which may differ from those found in many other industrialised countries. Geographic location may not reflect 'rurality' or 'urbanity' as frequently depicted in the research literature if we take account of the life experiences and values acquired by mobile sectors of the population.

Having discussed the problematic nature of the 'urban' versus 'rural' categories, in the remainder of this chapter I will continue to apply the categories as they were established in the original design of the study. As one sifts through the array of literacy practices evident in the homes and schools of these families, it is difficult to get beyond the complexity and diversity of what is described. Always conscious that generalisations cannot easily be drawn, we nevertheless sought patterns which may be revealed from the richness of the data. This chapter will mainly focus upon similarities and differences in literacy practices in urban and rural families. As there appears to be much less diversity among school literacy practices in all locations, I will provide only a brief analysis of these. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the main issues relating to urbanity and rurality which arise from the case studies.

Are Urban and Rural Families Different?

There appear to be significant differences across all of the families in both urban and rural categories. However, a closer look at some families suggest many similarities between social and literacy practices, although the contexts in which the families live may differ significantly. The following families live in different geographic locations. However, they show a number of similarities in their social and literacy practices and in their aspirations for their children.

The Jackson (Rural) and Ling (Urban) Families

Susan and Azmi Jackson are a Malay family who grew up and were educated on Cocos Island. The family speak Malay at home, although both parents speak English well. Susan worked as a dental nurse on Cocos, but now works as a night cleaner in order to

make sure one parent is always home with the children. Azmi is a slaughterman. There are four sons in the family, they speak Malay but do not write it. The boys learn to read the Qur'an every day and attend Malay school on Saturday and Sunday, where they learn to read the Qur'an which is translated into Malay in order for it to be understood. The children and their father are tri-literate and bilingual in English and Malay. Susan does not read Arabic.

The children are all encouraged to read and use books for their projects. Azmi reads the newspapers and Susan reads the papers and magazines. Apart from homework and Malay school there is not much writing done in the home. The children have a video computer game and watch television when there is something interesting to watch. Susan helps with the children's homework, although some of the maths is too difficult. The children are expected to complete high school and move on to university. The parents want to ensure their children will learn English, although they value their own cultural heritage and notice the differences between their own childhoods and that of their children.

Mr and Mrs Ling are a Chinese family who grew up on Christmas Island. Although all the children were brought up speaking Cantonese, they now prefer to speak English even to their parents. Both Mr and Mrs Ling completed Year 10 on Christmas Island, Mrs Ling completed a secretarial course and Mr Ling completed an apprenticeship. Mr Ling worked in the Transport Department in Karratha for sixteen years, but is now redundant. Mrs Ling now works as a tailor because Mr Ling likes her to work in the 'home'.

The reading practices of the Lings are similar to those of the Jacksons, they read the newspaper and magazines, while encouraging their children to read and exchange books. Mrs Ling supervises homework and assists the children with reading. Television is watched when the children are interested, although this is vetted to ensure programs are not violent. Like the Jacksons, religious practices play an important role in the family social and literacy practices. Mrs Ling reads the Bible regularly and the children attend Bible Study and Church weekly. The children have attended Mandarin classes organised by Chung Wah. The children did not enjoy these classes and attend no longer. Mr and Mrs Ling are anxious to ensure that their children get some qualifications. They feel their children are quite ambitious and are likely to gain professional qualifications. Like the Jacksons, the Lings want to see their children overcome the lack of opportunity suffered by their parents as an outcome of not attaining tertiary qualifications. They encourage their children to speak English fluently, but like the Jacksons feel concerned about the maintenance of their own culture.

The closely knit community enjoyed by the Malay people in Countrytown appears to have helped maintain Malay as the home language in the Jackson family. It appears though, that at least some of the Jackson children will leave Countrytown for tertiary study. It is interesting to note some contrasts with the other Muslim family in the study - the George family (Countrytown). In many ways the families look similar and yet there are differences related to reading practices and aspirations. The two daughters are

taught the Qur'an by their Father. They are also taught how to read the ingredients in manufactured foods, in order to ensure the maintenance of Halal dietary practices. The English of both parents, particularly Mrs George, appears to limit the support they can provide for reading, writing and completing homework in English. Hatini and Siti George, however, speak fluent English and prefer speaking English to Malay. In this family, the expectations of the parents are not well formed. They feel it is valuable for the girls to speak English as this can be useful for employment. They don't want their children to work in the meatworks and expect them to work, perhaps in Countrytown, before they marry. Hatini would like to be a model, but feels that her parents are unlikely to allow this.

The Hooper (Rural) and Smith (Urban) Families

At first glance these two families look quite disparate. Barbara and Graham Smith attended British grammar schools, both have university degrees, have lived in NSW and now reside in an exclusive Perth suburb. Graham works as an engineer and Barbara is engaged in home duties. Linda and Bruce Hooper live on a 7,000 acre property about 30 kilometres from Countrytown. Bruce left school after four years of high school, and Linda was schooled in Perth, completed a short training course run by the Pharmacy Guild and went to Countrytown to help make up prescriptions. She married Bruce and has been in Countrytown ever since.

When the literacy practices in the family are examined they are very similar. Both Linda and Barbara 'read a lot', they visit the library regularly and have a good supply of books in the home. Bruce and Graham read mostly work related magazines and information, and both read novels regularly, although there seems to be little time available for such reading. Linda and Barbara both read to their children when they were young and help with homework when they are asked. The children appear to be fairly independent and complete their homework without supervision unless there are problems. Both families are involved with their children's sport and spend a lot of time together. The Hooper children assist with farm chores, whilst the Smith children help with home renovations. The Hoopers and the Smiths both want their children to be happy and want to provide them with every opportunity to make that possible. Where necessary, or if the children wish, they will be sent to private school. Bruce considers it essential for Jason to go to agricultural university if he is going to be a successful farmer. He expects the success of farming in the future to be dependent on technical knowledge. In the Hooper household more writing appears to happen; Linda writes to Christine Hooper (who is at boarding school) every week and also writes regularly to agricultural exchange students from Holland, the UK, NZ and Canada. Linda participates more actively in the school community, helping with reading, in the canteen and the library, whereas Barbara does not participate in the school community as she feels it is not encouraged. In both families, the parents monitor their children's progress carefully and understand their children's literacy development in relation to community expectations.

The Manders/Gunn (Rural) and O'Leary (Urban) Families

The Manders/Gunn and O'Leary families are both Aboriginal families. Penelope Manders grew up in Countrytown but was educated in a mission school where she feels she learnt a lot and values the experience she had. Tom Gunn, on the other hand, felt school was a joke and at the time could not see any value in further education. Anne O'Leary went to a small country school which she really appreciated, completed year 10 followed by a secretarial course. Since then she has worked in Commonwealth and Aboriginal employment agencies. Bill O'Leary was educated in a mission school and then entered the army. He now works as a storeman with an airline. Penelope has SEN nursing training and is currently completing a pre-diploma course on Adult Aboriginal Health. She works in community health and Tom works for the Shire. Like Penelope, Anne completed a pre-tertiary program; an A-top program to train as a computing and typing teacher.

Both Anne and Penelope expressed an interest in reading books written by Aboriginal authors, an interest which they appear to have passed on to their children. Both families enjoy watching television and regularly watch videos. Liz O'Leary and Jinny and Michelle Manders all enjoy reading and read regularly. Anne and Penelope have both monitored their children's reading progress. The interest in reading developed by Liz O'Leary does not appear to be shared by Tom O'Leary who is much more interested in playing basketball.

Penelope and Anne have both participated in further study while their children have been at school. The children have seen their mothers regularly completing assignments, which appears to have fostered an interest in writing by the daughters. Access to government assistance for Aboriginal students has provided opportunities for both mothers to be involved in their children's schooling. Both families share an interest in Country and Western music. Penelope listens to music while doing her housework and Anne and Liz O'Leary listen to Country and Western music often in order to prepare for the regular singing performances given by Liz. Anne and Penelope would both like their children to complete highschool and go to university. Jinny Manders aspires to be a teacher or a vet, while Liz O'Leary would like to become a professional singer. However her mother would like her to finish school and go to University, if she is not successful as a singer.

The Milardovic (Rural) and Long (Urban) Families

Although there are some major differences between these two families, there are also some interesting similarities. Clearly, Maria and Peter Milardovic have a stronger economic base to their lives than do Mr and Mrs Long. Peter Milardovic is a self-employed builder, whereas Mr Long is a shift worker and Mrs Long a part-time word processor. However, Peter Milardovic and the Longs are all recent migrants to Australia; Maria was born in Australia but her parents immigrated from Naples. Peter migrated to Australia from Yugoslavia and speaks Croatian. Peter does not read and write in English and therefore does very little reading and writing, since he does not

have access to texts in his first language. Mr Long grew up in Bradford, U.K., and can read and write, but does not read very much. Both Maria and Mrs Long enjoy reading and do so regularly. Maria and Mrs Long both do much of the writing in the household, Maria does all of the household bills and helps with all of the children's homework. Mrs Long also helps the children with their assignments in terms of setting out and organisation.

In both families, Maria and Mr and Mrs Long put a lot of energy into supporting the self worth of the children and assisting with homework, emphasising the importance of learning to read and write:

> Maria said that she didn't want her older children to go away and that she did not encourage them to go to university. Both had the choice of staying and working in Countrytown but they did well in their TEE and chose to go to Perth to study. I asked if she encouraged them with their education.
>
> 'I sort of pushed them to study, they just got good at it, you know. I had to help them to work out their problems, their speech and that, help them and listen to them. I remember I cut out some letters off the cornflakes box, the R and the T's and the S's and put them all over the house, one here and one there and they'd learn it like that, their letters.' This was before the children went to school. 'We'd have visitors and they'd see all these letters around the kitchen, and I'd says 'Well the kids are learning 'em.' I asked where she got the idea, 'I don't know!'.
>
> 'Cause they wouldn't, when you tried to write to them on the paper they wouldn't look at it long enough. So I said now I'll just cut out the letters and put 'em all over the house, then they'd seen them and they'd remember. And I remember Paul, before he was in Grade One, I would make him a list of words like sun, the sun outside or him the son, write them down and he'd learn them. And he knew that, he knew lots of words before he went to school.'

In the Long family, Andrew is achieving very well at school, he is the School Captain, plays soccer successfully and has won three scholarships for academic extension programs in different High Schools. Mr and Mrs Long provide support for his schoolwork:

> Mr Long is involved in Andrew's work at PEAC (a pull-out program for intellectually talented students). For his chemistry course Mr Long gave advice:
>
> "I says to him just do a basic (experiment) which my idea were just oil and water, how heavy is objects that sink and float and build on from there."
>
> Mr Long discusses many topics with Andrew, including homosexuality and drugs:
>
> "It's easy to say this now but I don't think I'll worry about drugs and such like that. We can just talk to him about it. I don't think he'll be bothered like not be interested, not in that way anyway."
>
> Mr Long thinks that Andrew needs to work hard now that he's in Year 7 and preparing to go to high school:

"We've told him he's got to sit down at least half an hour three times a week and practise (typing). It will help him with his homework for next year. I think he'd like to do (gymnastics) a bit more serious but it's his schooling, he knows he's got to buckle down."

Sally Long is not nearly as successful as her brother Andrew. However, her mother continues to encourage and support her as she learns to read and write, thereby constructing reading as a meaningful and enjoyable social practice:

Andrew taped Mrs Long reading a bedtime story with Sally. Mrs Long reads to Sally from Beware of Boys, a book which Sally has already told me she enjoys because it's funny. She discusses the pictures with Sally. Sally takes over at some points and Mrs Long prompts where necessary. Sally asks for the meaning of unknown words:

MRS L: One barrel of bricks and one trowel. Method. One. First catch your boy.

SALLY: What's a trowel?

MRS L: A trowel. That's... You put plaster on the wall with it. First catch your boy...

When Mrs Long has finished reading Sally says, "Now it's my turn" and reads *Matilda and the Dragon* with encouragement from her mother. Errors are not corrected. Again there is discussion of the pictures and of new vocabulary. Sally does not want to finish. The session finishes with a hug and a kiss.

The Longs have bought a computer to help Andrew with his assignments. Mrs Long constructs literacy as a pragmatic practice as she helps him with his assignments:

He went to the local library with Mrs Long to find some information from a biography and other books and consulted a book which he won at school for academic excellence. He had to sift through the information and make decisions in order to write the assignment:

ANDREW: The book that I got from the library says that she died of this funny thing.. it didn't say leukemia it had something else. And then that book said that she died from leukemia and then I got these sheets. I'm not sure which book they're from because I photocopied it.. It said she died of leukemia as well so I stuck with leukemia... I had two references (for leukemia) and only one for the other one.

Andrew had help from Mrs Long in organising the assignment and in classifying information:

ANDREW: That's where my mum helped me by like, she said to put it in areas like this. Put like family history on one page.. and just set it out like that.. I learnt how to set it out better and a lot of information like that... So I found out (from Mum) how to look through books to find more information instead of just looking through it and picking out little things, I should concentrate on what I'm doing.

In the Milardovic family, Maria is the focus for family talk and discussion. She reads and enjoys the children's books and helps them with the homework. Through her dialogue, she constructs literacy as interpretive and pragmatic practices:

SOPHIE: (Reading) On June twenty sixth six ninety one there was a tragic accident. A boy, Jamie Sampson, died from bee stings. Jamie was allergic to bees and he didn't know. He'd poked a stick in a hole and bees stung him. Mu-um, it has to fill up a whole page I don't have enough!

MARIA: Well what can you say to fill it up (inaudible)

SOPHIE: I know, I don't have a clue.

FRAN.: Is that *A Taste of Blackberries* ?

SOPHIE: Yeah.

MARIA: You'll have to think of something.

SOPHIE: Mmm, I don't know.

FRAN.: That's a pretty good book, we read that in year five.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

MARIA: Anyway Fran, you played a good game for basketball tonight. Two goals. Shame you lost but[.....

FRAN.: [Yeah it was good. (giggles)

(Inaudible conversation)

SOPHIE: So mum, what'll I do now?

MARIA: Er, you've got to think of more things to write but you got to start thinking too.

SOPHIE: Yeah well I don't know what [to write

MARIA: [About the ambulance and who found him [and that.

SOPHIE: [Oh maybe, I know, Mrs Mullins found 'im and she rang the ambulance I think. Yeah, yeah, she did. And then, and then um, the ambulance come and I think he died, he died.

FRAN.: He died?

At the conclusion of the dialogue Maria offers her assistance as follows:

MARIA: All right Sophie, what did you write so far? Now read that.

SOPHIE: I've got, *No-one came to Jamie's aid until it was too late. He was found by Mrs Hauser who rang the ambulance. And after a couple of days the funeral took place with a little gathering of prayers. It was tragic for Jamie's family and friends. They are starting to recover Jamie's death.*

MARIA: "They are starting to recover from Jamie's death". Can you fit from in there?

SOPHIE: Yeah, in there.

MARIA: Here's the pen.

(inaudible bits and bits re pens)

MARIA: Is that enough?

SOPHIE: That should be enough, and then I've just got the background and I've got the concluding sentence. I've already got that.

MARIA: Then will this book be finished this week?

SOPHIE: Yeah
MARIA: then you go on to another book.

In the Milardovic and Long families, one of the parents has spent time assisting in the primary school. Mr Long assists in the Redlands school because he works nights. Maria helps at St Andrew's, although she does not have very much to do with the high school.

In both of these families one of the parents does not have well developed literacy skills, nor do the families have advanced educational backgrounds. Through the support, hard work and insightful practices of the parents (mainly the mothers), most of the children appear to be developing effective literacy skills, although Sally Long finds learning to read quite difficult.

The Binayi (Rural) and Kuhn (Urban) Families

These two families, at first glance, appear to be quite different. The Kuhn family are farmers from Cambodia and the Binayi family has grown up in Blue Creek. Languages play an important role in the lives of both families. Apart from Mrs Kuhn, the family are bilingual (some of the children more so than others), in Khmer and English. The Binayi's are multilingual and bi-dialectic, switching from language to language usually in order to meet the needs of the person being addressed. The Binayi's also tend to use English rather than Kriol when speaking to Non-Aborigines.

The extended family appear to be an important part of community life for both the Kuhn's and Binayi's. It seems, that in both families different members of the wider family converse and interact, moving in and out of the family as they wish. Both families do not appear to have many books in the house. Mr Kuhn and Karen Binayi both enjoy reading and are anxious to help their children speak English effectively and learn to read and write in English; although they are also anxious to maintain the family languages which are spoken in their homes. Karen Binayi does tend to read to her pre-school child whereas exposure to print for pre-school children in the Kuhn family does not seem to be part of everyday life.

Television provides a backdrop in the life in both families. The Kuhn family sometimes watch SBS as they live in Perth. They also watch many movies, family programs and sports programs, as do the Binayi family. The pre-school Kuhn children try to copy the songs and dances from the television and the children learn English from the TV. The Binayis also participate in television watching, by singing the advertisements and Bessie (Karen's mother) sometimes provides a Kriol narrative to describe the action of the television.

Storytelling forms an important part of life in both families. Much of life in the Binayi family is taken up with 'stories' of what is happening around them. Storytelling is carried out by Bessie and Shirley Binayi. The family enjoys the re-telling of stories they have been told. In the Kuhn family storytelling is also an important part of life. The parents tell of their life in Cambodia and the children enjoy retelling these stories:

> There's a story about like this man and he was going to die and he um smokes too much and he says he's going to die and my dad was there, he says he wants to smoke a cigarette before he dies so my dad brought a cigarette for him and he smoked it and when he was finished it he was dead...like he won't...so he will be happy when he's dead.

Bessie Binayi teaches the Jaru language and culture at the local primary school. Mr Kuhn teaches Khmer at the Cambodian School on the weekends. In both families an effort is being made by the older members to maintain their language and culture. In both instances this allows the older members of the family to interact with the staff at the local school.

The Kuhn and Binayi families are quite different to the other families described so far. Although the families live in different geographic and social contexts, there are a number of commonalities about the social and literacy practices in the family which make them similar. These common practices such as storytelling and multilingualism may be some of the assets which these families take to school with them, but which may go unnoticed when schools are planning to meet the literacy needs of their children.

Different Patterns

So far I have attempted to show how, despite the highly individual and complex fabric of the lives in all families, many of the rural families have literacy practices which appear similar to those of urban families. I could put together a configuration of urban and rural families which would demonstrate that *some* rural families are different in certain ways from urban families. For example, if the Scott/Clay/Bailey family (Redcliffe) were juxtaposed against the Kelly or the Hendricksen (Countrytown) families a different pattern would emerge. Bridgit Kelly is currently completing an Associate Diploma of Health Science at TAFE and is therefore reading and writing regularly in the home. She spends much of her time reading the children's text book and limits the children's television viewing, as well as helping them understand the values being conveyed by different TV programs. She helps her children with their reading by showing them how to predict and use phonological analysis:

> They were evidently having fun. Liam made wild guesses, "Milk, jam....." "No. Sounding out your guess," responded Bridgit. Hesitantly he sounded out "jogging" followed by "sh o ets shops?"
>
> BRIDGIT: No, jogging ...
> LIAM: Sh sh shows?
> BRIDGIT: Oo es.
> LIAM: Shoes.
> BRIDGIT: Jogging, jogging shoes.
>
> Much of the interaction followed this pattern. At another point Liam guessed the word "kittens."

BRIDGIT: Yeah good. OK that must be kittens then, You're quite right.
LIAM: See I can guess the book!!
BRIDGIT: That was a good guess.

Gradually Liam started to tire.

LIAM: Where do I have to read up to?
BRIDGIT: We have to read to page 7 so we have another page to go. This is only page 5. Keep going.
LIAM: Which page is this?
BRIDGIT: You got to read two more after this one.

Anne and Neil in the Scott/Clay/Bailey family provide every member of the family with a television in order to cope with the demands of a blended family. Anne Scott also takes an active interest in the children's program at school and their homework. However, she constructs reading as a skill which needs to be learned, rather than a meaning-based and pragmatic practice. When she helps with the children's homework she is often *trying to keep ahead of it* and, at times, gets quite frustrated:

ANNE: Well I'll tell you that two of those are wrong.
MILLIE: I thought so.
ANNE: Hey?
MILLIE: I thought so.
ANNE: You thought so. Why do you think so?
MILLIE: [inaudible]
ANNE: Well flattery is untrue compliment ...
MILLIE: Mnn
ANNE: What does insincere mean?
MILLIE: I don't know.
ANNE: You should look up words you don't know in the dictionary not just pretend. Insincere ... [looking up the dictionary] This dictionary is a little bit too adult for you I think. In ... sin ... Insincere. Disingenuous which can mean anything. Let's look up sincere. G H I J K ... sin ... sincere, free from pretence or deceit, genuine. Do you know what genuine is?
MILLIE: Not really.
ANNE: Real.
MILLIE: Yes.
ANNE: So if sincere means real, insincere means not sincere ...
MILLIE: So it's not real.
ANNE: Not real. What does that bring us back to? If it's not real than it's ... could possibly be ... we were talking about something. One of the words there has been talked about as not real.
MILLIE: Not real ... [very long pause]
ANNE: Are you thinking anything or are you just staring?
MILLIE: No I'm reading .... [long pause again]
ANNE: What are you reading?

MILLIE: Those words.
ANNE: Hey?
MILLIE: I want to find out what ..
ANNE: But these are the words you're looking at so.
MILLIE: [long pause]
ANNE: Oh leave it.

Clearly, there is diversity in literacy practices amongst many families. However these differences are as apparent within 'urban' and 'rural' categories as they are when making comparisons across these categories. Just as evident are many commonalities across some of the urban and rural families.

School Literacy Practices

As one trawls through the sampled accounts of school literacy practices in both urban and rural settings, it becomes apparent that school literacy practices appear highly homogeneous. This may be accounted for by the widespread professional development programs which have been held over recent years in Western Australian schools. In the 1980's the ELIC Program was used to in-service every K-3 teacher in the State, including those in the Kimberleys and remote Aboriginal communities. Over the past four years the First Steps professional development program has been provided to all priority schools in both urban and rural areas. It has been trialled on Christmas Island, in the Kimberleys, the Western Desert and in rural and urban schools. By the end of 1994 it is expected that all Government schools in Western Australia will have been provided with professional development in First Steps.

The *First Steps* program provides teachers with a method for mapping children's progress and then provides suggested teaching activities and strategies to promote the further literacy development of students. Although there is not much evidence of children receiving tuition to meet their individual needs, there is evidence to show how many of the suggested teaching strategies have become widespread across schools in all geographic locations. For example, shared book strategies, sustained silent reading, news telling plans, frameworks for writing in different genres, reciprocal teaching, modelled writing and the writing of individual and class books. At times there is also a concentration on specific skills such as phonics, spelling and grammar.

One common feature is that there are limited efforts by the schools, in both urban and rural settings, to harmonise school literacy texts and practices with the diversity of practices in their communities. In Countrytown both Highglen and Countrytown Primary show little acknowledgement of the Malay/Muslim communities. At Countrytown Primary some efforts are being made to meet the needs of the pre-primary Aboriginal students, however the content of lessons does not appear to be directed towards the interest and knowledge of the Aboriginal or Malay communities. Similarly the culture and knowledge of the Asian community at Windsor Park, rarely appears to be recognised or related to the school curriculum. There are some obvious exceptions.

At both Jaji School in Blue Creek and Radcliffe Primary there has been a major effort to relate the culture and background of the school community to the school curriculum, particularly through the bilingual programs. At Blue Creek there also appears to be time assigned for the cultural activities of the Jaru people. In both these cases, literacy resources are limited and many of the texts must be written and developed on site by the class teachers.

Developing written language skills takes up considerable time in all of the classrooms. This appears to be one area where schools provide literacy practices which are often not present in the homes. The writing activities in both urban and rural schools appear to be similar. However in the rural schools, the content of what gets written by the children, reflects their geographic location. Topics about farming activities and sports played in the town, form part of the children's written texts, as well as the oral texts developed during news telling. Sport plays a highly significant role in the lives of most of the rural families, providing a major social focus for the communities. Television viewing of sporting events is a high priority in most of the rural families, especially the viewing of Australian Rules Football. Linda Hooper stated:

> that she never watches television during the day time. The television would probably go on at six o'clock for the evening news: the only exception to that is if the Eagles are playing.

(It is worth noting for most males in both urban and rural communities, television viewing of sport is an important activity.)

Primary schools in rural areas appear to play a stronger role in the life of the community than do their urban counterparts. Eight out of eleven of the parents (usually the mothers) in Countrytown, Yabby Creek and Blue Creek indicated that they have regularly helped out at the school, either assisting in classrooms, the library or the canteen. Many of the parents, including the fathers, attend P&C meetings and help with working bees. This does not seem to be so apparent in the urban schools, although some of the urban mothers do paid work in the canteen, and the Long and Bauman families both do voluntary work at Redlands Primary School. This is worth considering more closely, therefore the next section offers a description of how one rural school provides a focus for that community.

The School as Part of a Community

The Yabby Creek Primary School seems to be closely connected to its community. There is a fluidity in the classrooms which encourages parental participation and where much of the community life is integrated into the content of lessons. Both the Johnson and the Waugh families keep in close contact with the school.

AMANDA: Brian usually helps out with the different jobs that need to be done and we try to get to as many working bees as we can. I go to the assemblies, sports days, we go to parent nights and if we can possibly support it we do, definitely.

> The school sometimes gets parents to come into the school to help with children's reading and Amanda has done so on a few occasions. Amanda mentioned the irony of it all as she finds it difficult enough to find time to do it with her own children let alone someone else's.

Helen and Liam Johnson mix socially with the teachers and Helen often pops in to see if there are any problems. The school principal, on one occasion, did a 50km round trip to drop one of the children home.

Lessons in the multi-grade classrooms appear to flow smoothly from one activity to another, with the children taking considerable responsibility for their own work :

> Without instruction and hesitation, Michelle gets down to work. She reads aloud and finds two missing words with ease.

The teacher in the Year 1/2 classroom has an integrated language program which incorporates as much as possible of the children's own lives:

> I am struck by the way Ms N is able to incorporate her knowledge of the families of the children in the classroom for this particular activity and the news telling activity earlier this morning.

The children move back and forth from some large groups to small groups without fuss, apparently accustomed to the routines of a multi-grade classroom.

In the Year 6/7 classroom the children have also acquired considerable personal responsibility and move to allocated tasks without supervision. The children are responsible for working on their own spelling journals and making sure that these get checked regularly. When the class are told to write about current events they are asked to establish the setting - who, where, when, what, why and to have one paragraph per event. Through joint negotiation and discussion of these events, the teacher challenges the students' interpretation of local events:

> One gets the sense of the unique way in which the class is able to draw upon a pool of knowledge of the community. The class discusses whose cars were stolen, the condition the cars were found in, how one of the victims was especially unlucky as he was about to trade in his car that week, the habits of people in Yabby Creek when it comes to safeguarding their cars. Some of the children's knowledge of the incident is very much hearsay, and Mr M is quick to intervene and question the authority of such knowledge.

CHILD:	They think it was an Aboriginal because there was a meeting in Wirrinup.
MR M:	A lot of people have said that but no one really knows.
CHILD:	(inaudible)
MR M:	Pardon?
CHILD:	They found the finger prints.
MR M:	You've got to have a suspect before you can look at finger prints.
CHILD:	(inaudible)
MR M:	Pardon? I noticed there's a tendency to blame Aboriginals for everything. It might have been, it may not have been. So I mean

> just because there was a meeting in Wirrinup doesn't necessarily mean it was Aboriginals. It could be anybody.

The children were currently involved in writing a project on farming. In order to do this they were encouraged to write away to different organisations to get further information for their assignments. Later, when the teacher introduced a new form of writing to the children, she integrated the students current interest in Crazy Crabs, by suggesting they write a description about Hermit Crabs.

In general, both the content of lessons and the ways in which the children work seem a more direct extension of their daily lives in this community. However, the literacy practices in the Year 6/7 classroom at Yabby Creek appear to resemble those of the Year 7 classroom at Windsor Park. In both classrooms there is a conscious effort to integrate language learning with topics in other curriculum areas - the teachers pick up issues which relate to events or occurrences in the lives of the children. While in Yabby Creek there appears to be more attention paid to local community events, at Windsor Park topics are related to literary themes or issues which arise from the content of the school curriculum. These do not appear to include specific discussion of the cultural differences amongst the school population, although general discussion about bullying, sportsmanship and treating people 'fairly' do get taken up as part of the 'themes' dealt with through literature.

Issues for Consideration

Reading and Writing

As we indicate throughout this Report, when discussing a sample of twenty three families, it is dangerous to make any generalisations about literacy practices. However, I would like to end by highlighting some interesting issues which arise from the data. These issues appear to warrant further explication.

Reading plays an important role in the lives of the rural communities. For many of the women, reading is still an important form of entertainment. Through their practices, the women shape and construct reading for their families as an enjoyable, meaningful and useful practice. Robbie Hendricksen, Bridgit Kelly and Linda Hooper describe their reading with authenticity and enthusiasm:

Robbie Hendricksen:

> "That was really good, that was an autobiography too. *From Strength to Strength.* [Sara Henderson] That was brilliant. Who wrote that? Do you know that book? It's an autobiography about the woman who, yes, oh that's brilliant. Her life was just horrendous. And she was the one that got left with, when her husband died she got left with that station to run. Well I just finished that and I gave it to Jackie. She's just finished reading it. That's a brilliant book."
>
> "Susie said that you were always reading!"

> "Well always in my spare time. I try to read if I can a few pages in the morning and a bit in the evening. I would prefer reading to most other things. Trying to snatch 10 minutes here and there to read. I wake up in the morning at 6.00 in the winter so that I can read till 6.30 when I get up. In the summer I wake up at 5.00 so that I can read till 5.30 when I get up. And that's great. I just love that you know because no one else is awake and it's quiet and I can devour more pages."

Bridgit Kelly:

> "I read in bed a lot. I also because of my studies I read a lot. Not fiction, it's all non-fiction. I don't get to read fiction at all. I read to the kids stories. I read their study books and textbooks. I read at work." (Bridgit is upgrading her nursing qualifications).

Linda Hooper:

> "I read a lot," Linda told me, adding that "Bruce can't read what he wants to read because he's got so much information about work to keep up with, from the Wool Board and the Wheat Board, leaflets and booklets which have to be read. He likes political books like *The Rise and Fall of Alan Bond.* Linda likes "a bit of light reading like the Danielle Steele." She recently read Sara Henderson's book *From Strength to Strength.* "At the moment I'm reading the *Power of One* but I've got to concentrate a bit on it, so I've two books going, one's a very light one."
>
> Linda said she often buys books as presents, "Nothing's easier for a gift than to buy someone a book." She buys them from the Countrytown bookshop. I asked if she used the library and she told me she uses the one in the local hamlet, not the one in Countrytown.

The women seem to transfer their interest in reading to their daughters, who also appear to be genuinely engaged in reading, not as a task set by the school nor because they are supervised by parents.

Parents construct literacy as a pragmatic practice through demonstrations of how reading and writing relate to other aspects of their lives. Reading the newspaper is an important part of life in rural communities. Most of the families read the newspaper regularly and feel it is important to keep up with what is going on in the world. The men focus their reading mostly on reading work related newspapers, magazines and journals. The farmers find it necessary to read farming journals in order to keep up with the farm procedures and practices. The rural boys in the study appeared less interested in reading for entertainment, although, like their fathers, they are quite interested in news and practical texts. The Malay families do not appear to read for entertainment, to the same extent. However, they read regularly as part of their religious practices.

Writing also appears to happen more often in the rural families. Three of the mothers (Kelly, Manders and Johnson) are participating in upgrading qualifications and write frequently as part of their studies. The Hooper family write regular letters to their daughters in Perth and to visiting agricultural exchange students. The Hendricksen children write to their father regularly and Mrs Hendricksen does her bookwork at

home as well as secretarial work for the Pony Club. The Hoopers, Waughs, Johnsons and Milardovics all do their work related bookwork at home. Both the George and Jackson families participate in writing as part of their attendance at Malay school.

As one reads through the rural cases, it becomes evident that most of these families are involved in many activities together. For example, Patrick Kelly is interested and experienced with understandings about permaculture, while the Hooper, Waugh and Johnson families all participate in regular farming activities. The Hendricksen family spend much of their time with the Pony Club, in which their mother is heavily involved. The interest taken by the children in their parents' work and leisure time activities may transfer to the reading and writing practices associated with these activities.

It may be that rural families do participate in more home writing practices than urban families. If this is the case, it might explain why the *Monitoring Standards in Education Project* found that rural children out performed urban children in Year 3 and Year 7. Similarly, it is interesting to note how the work related practices of the Carroll family (Radcliffe) spill over into their home life. This seems to have encouraged their children to engage with reading and writing. But this link between parental work and home writing practices appears to be more overt in the rural homes.

Aspirations

Many of the rural families expressed serious concerns about the future of life in their communities. Linda and John Hooper talk about the future.

> "I feel very, very sorry for young people at the moment. Jason is very lucky and I think he realises how lucky he is." He was always told that he did not have to take over the farm whereas his father was expected to do so and was taken out of school to do so. Linda said that she and Bruce agreed they would rather sell up than force Jason to take it over.
>
> Linda continued, telling me that there are no apprenticeships and that children are forced to stay on until year twelve when they should be leaving school at fifteen to be a mechanic or a carpenter. "Here in country areas in ten years time we won't have mechanics, plumbers. Ten, fifteen years ago most people had an apprentice with them, now they don't. In Perth you can ring up and ask for a plumber and he'll say 'I can come at two o'clock tomorrow' and you put up with the problem but here they say, 'Well I can't come.' And you say 'Well why not?' and they say, ' Well I don't travel that far for a start' or 'I'm too busy.' Because there's not enough of them around but they haven't got any apprentices." She talked about how sad the situation makes her feel.
>
> I asked Bruce if he felt it was essential for Jason to go to agricultural university if he is going to be a successful farmer. "For the future, not at the moment. Possibly it's an advantage at the moment. For the future to get a broader understanding of how things work as much as any technical information. A broader understanding of how people think, that you'll be dealing with. Further education might help you understand how a lot of these people [bureaucrats] which could reflect on how you run your business and attempt to move, well the success of farming is to move ahead of when the bulk move. If you're listening

> to farm advisers who have their information on what has happened, in their advice, that is the most successful way to go. Usually that's when the mob go through the gate and that's usually too late. That's when you run into trouble. My idea is to get very business orientated in an attempt that you will make business decision based on understandings of what may be coming not on information of what has happened."

The Hoopers are increasing their off-farm investment in order to cater for the future of their daughters, whom they expect to go to University and will be unlikely to return to Countrytown.

Amanda Waugh (Yabby Creek) tells how she would like her children to pursue some sort of training after they leave school. Although the family have bought more property to cater for their four sons, she feels it is important for them to have a trade in order to fall back on if things are quiet on the farm, or if things don't work out as planned.

Helen Johnson says:

> One, I want my kids to see that there's more to life than just this little town ... Two, as a safety net because you don't know what, with farming the way it is in particular, you just don't know what's around the corner ...

The growing uncertainty of life in rural communities is clearly encouraging parents to think very seriously about their children's education and possible choices. Parents appear to begin thinking about these issues when their children are still very young. Changing circumstances in country areas, may well be placing more pressure on parents and children to make the best use of the educational opportunities available to them.

Aspirations and the shaping of Literacy Practices

In many of the families, both urban and rural, the women take most of the responsibility for reading to children, supervising homework and maintaining links with schools, although Mr Long (Redlands) assists at the school and helps with school outings. However in the rural families, one is struck by the remarkable influence the women have upon the aspirations of their children. In the Kelly, Hendricksen, Hooper, Manders/Gunn, Milardovics, Johnson and Binayi families, the women have achieved a higher educational level than their partners, whilst Anne Caravaggio has a university education, as does her husband. In the George family, Mr George appears to have attained more advanced schooling than his wife, however Susan Jackson speaks English as fluently as her husband and worked as a dental nurse in Cocos Island. It may be a coincidence, but it is worth noting that in the rural families where the women have more advanced education and have moved out of their rural communities in order to gain qualifications or employment, they have a strong motivation to help shape the literacy practices and aspirations of their children.

This is well illustrated by briefly referring to the two Yabby Creek families; the Waughs and the Johnsons. Amanda Waugh has lived all of her life in a rural community, she

left school in Year 10 and worked as a cook before she married. The Waugh's have bought land to accommodate their four sons, although they think it would be a good idea for the boys to learn a trade to *fall back on.*. They seem to have given little thought to the future of their daughter Georgina. Amanda Waugh says:

> she's a fairly caring little person, so I don't know, maybe say nursing or Kindy aide or something like that one day, I don't know what she'll do. Probably what her mother did, get married and have a heap of kids.

Helen Johnson completed Year 12 in Perth and began studying medicine, which she did not complete. She is currently completing a Bachelor of Applied Science externally. Helen says:

> "Well all my girls, and Paul as well, but particularly for the girls, I don't care if they end up just getting married and having kids and living on a farm, like I'm doing, as long as they have done something in between ... I don't dislike this life, because I love it but I don't want my girls to sort of finish year 10, get a job in the local store in Yabby Creek, marry the boy next door, and that's the whole extent of their life ..."
>
> Helen is wary that *young girls start to think that that's what life is.* She is adamant to show her girls that it is possible to have work and study pursuits and at the same time be married with children. She doesn't want her girls *to think that anything can limit what they want to do except them themselves.* But while Helen emphasised the individual as free agent, she went on to highlight the other side of the coin, what she referred to as reality, *'responsibilities'* and 'a *fact of life*'.

Helen feels there are avenues which can help her children reach their goals in life. She currently drives Naomi, a talented swimmer, to swimming training in Red Valley (a 200 km round trip each week).

Although Amanda Waugh is anxious to help the children with their literacy practices, she finds it a struggle to encourage the children to complete their homework and 'do' their nightly reading. In the excerpt below she constructs reading as something that must get 'done', not as an enjoyable and meaningful activity:

CHRIS.:	A long, long time ...
AMANDA:	ago
CHRIS.:	ago ... A little man and a little old woman lived in a old house. In the house there was a shop where ... man ... [
AMANDA:	A little old man
CHRIS.:	... made (interruption) shoes ... [
AMANDA:	Read that
CHRIS.:	The little old woman helped him. They were happy when they had met made many shoes. One night the little old man said ... to the little woman no ...
AMANDA:	m o n e (sounding out the letters)
CHRIS.:	money we must have money to get ... (inaudible)
AMANDA:	Good boy.
CHRIS.:	the shoes. We can cannot

AMANDA: C a n t (sounding out the letters)
CHRIS.: Can't (inaudible) ...
AMANDA: Sit up, keep going. Only got a couple more pages to go.
CHRIS.: Come on, you got to be joking. (inaudible).
AMANDA: Come on

Helen Johnson, on the other hand, provides constructive assistance to her children. She encourages her children to make literacy and learning a meaningful, useful and joyful activity:

Michelle is keen to demonstrate what she has learnt at school about Space. She wants to tell her Mum the mnemonics that help her to remember the planets and their order in the solar system. It becomes a conversation which Naomi, Paul and Helen build upon.

MICHELLE: Mum? Mum? Well I know how um, um//
NAOMI: Um, um don't say um
MICHELLE: The earth goes, actually the solar system goes.
NAOMI: So do I
MICHELLE: There's Mercury, Mercury and after that is//
NAOMI: Venus
MICHELLE: Got that, then there's Earth, um
HELEN: Mercury around Earth.
MICHELLE: Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus ... oh I just remembered something then!
HELEN: Neptune
MICHELLE: Neptune and Pluto. And I know how to ...
MICHELLE: [And there's a new one]
MICHELLE: Pardon?
PAUL: And there's a new planet behind Pluto.
MICHELLE: And do you know what Mum? Now I know how it goes in order.
NAOMI: [You forgot Uranus]
HELEN: No she said Uranus
NAOMI: Oh
MICHELLE: Uranus and I know how it goes in order. I know how you can remember them. **M**y **V**ery **E**xcellent **M**other **J**ust **S**howed **U**s **N**ine **P**lanets.
HELEN: Oh
PAUL: I know what else you can make.
MICHELLE: What?
PAUL: **M**y **V**ery **M**odel **J**eep **S**till **U**ses **N**eptune **P**etrol
HELEN: **M**y **V**ery **E**arly **M**odel **J**eep.

Helen also assists her children with writing. to help a child on a project she:

had provided her a comprehensive outline of all the major systems of the body and the key questions that needed to be answered under each one. For example, for the Circulatory System, Helen had written:

> *- What does it consist of?*
>
> *- Blood - made of what? Function? Transports what? How does it move in body.*
>
> *- The Heart - function (what it does)*
>
> *- structure (how it works)*
>
> *- Blood vessels - what types?*
>
> *- structure?*
>
> *- where main vessels?*
>
> *- How does circulation work?*

Helen's influence on the aspirations of her children are clear. She not only helps her children with their school work but, through her own language and literacy practices, constructs for her children an understanding of the world at large. Perhaps, as Ogbu (1974) suggests, linguistic and cultural differences alone do not explain differences in educational success. Helen claims: *I reckon if you have high enough aspirations your kids pick it up and they go that way'*

Conclusion

From this analysis of the home and school literacy practices of a number of families, there appear to be many commonalities between rural and urban home literacy practices. At the same time there is a diversity and variety *within* and *across* both groups. This diversity, however, seems not only to be linked to rural and urban location or resources. It appears to be more closely related to the background socialisation and literacy experiences of the parents and their aspirations for their children.

School literacy practices appear to be relatively common across rural and urban communities and do not reflect the diversity of practices evident in many of the homes. In one urban school, an effort is being made to meet the specific literacy needs of some members of the school community by providing a bilingual program for children from the Cambodian families. There is also one remote school which is making similar efforts to match school practices with some of the social practices in the families of its Aboriginal community.

The study tentatively suggests that many rural families appear to rely on reading and writing as a mode of communication that is highly significant in their daily lives. Their social practices therefore call upon literacy in recurrent and direct ways. Many of the urban families also value reading and writing. However, it may be that their social

practices more frequently gravitate around the television and the computer. More significantly, this study reveals the complexity of family life and associated social practices in *all* communities. It demonstrates how difficult it is to generalise about home literacy practices and their interaction with the literacy demands of schooling.

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CHAPTER 4
LANGUAGE DIVERSITY AND LITERACY PRACTICES

Caroline Barratt-Pugh

Why investigate the literacy practices of NESB families?

Recent research into the educational achievements of students from non-English speaking backgrounds points to improved schooling outcomes and suggests that the education of this particular group of students is no longer of concern (Sturman, 1986; Birrell, 1987; Bullivant, 1987; Williams *et al*, 1987). However detailed analysis of this research has revealed some major problems which render this conclusion unsustainable. First, the tendency to generalise findings from one group to all NESB groups hide differences across groups. Second, failure to take account of key factors within groups, such as length of time in Australia, education and socio-economic status masks differentiation within groups. Third, inconsistencies in the definition of the cohort under study and data gathering instruments makes comparisons between studies unreliable. Finally, the statistical nature of these particular studies does not take account of student perspectives of school experience, which are crucial in identifying other factors that determine the quality and outcomes of education for students from NESB (Kalantzis, Cope & Slade, 1989).

Furthermore, the correlation between cultural and linguistic background and school success, frequently used as a means of explaining differential outcomes is simplistic and misleading. There appear to be differences within and across groups in relation to school achievement, retention at school and entry into higher education (Meade, 1983; Power, *et al* 1985; Ogbu, 1987). A number of explanations have been posited to account for these differences. These include 'cultural deficit' models in which children are thought to be disadvantaged by socially and linguistically impoverished homes (Hess and Shipman, 1965); 'cultural communication clash' models which explain failure in terms of the differences between the home and school verbal and nonverbal communication styles (Hymes, 1972) and a 'cultural distance' model developed by Ogbu (1987). Ogbu argues that different cultural groups develop more or less successful ways of crossing cultural boundaries and dealing with difference. Some become what Ogbu terms caste-like minority oppressed groups unable to achieve success because "they have greater difficulty crossing cultural boundaries due to an oppositional cultural frame of reference and oppositional identity." (Ogbu, 1987. p334). This research project has enabled us to explore the relationship between linguistic and cultural background and literacy development within and across a range

of linguistically diverse families. Analysis of the data has uncovered a complex web of factors which all serve to influence the construction of literacy within the home, school and community.

Who are NESB families?

The term 'non-English speaking background' is currently used to categorise a range of groups including indigenous Aboriginal families, third generation migrants and newly arrived peoples. Clearly the term NESB is inadequate as a category description of a group of people from such diverse backgrounds and experiences. The richness of their linguistic repertoire, cultural and religious beliefs and practices, socialising processes and literacy practices are made invisible, creating the illusion of a homogeneous group. The term also encompasses a deficit view of particular groups, defining them only in relation to their use or lack of use of the English language. In addition to this, the whole notion of what might constitute a non-English speaking *background* is highly problematic. How many generations should be considered in determining background? Or is background only related to those living in Australia?

As we began to select our families it became apparent that the categorisation of some families as NESB, though correct in superficial terms, was inappropriate and misleading. The complexities encompassed in each family in relation to 'language background' began to emerge as we discovered that, out of the ten families categorised as NESB, seven did in fact have English *as part of* their linguistic background. Conversely, out of the total of twenty three families, fourteen identified themselves as having some family connection to languages other than English.

Initially, as we intended to select our families through schools, we approached schools which had children from a range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds and then asked the principal to identify families who might be willing to take part in the study. Three of the families live in Windsor Park and readily agreed to be in the study although one of the parents remarked that he was not sure if his family fitted the criteria of NESB. He explained that they are an *Australian / Indonesian blended* family and all the children are literate in English. Several families at Redlands Primary were approached by the Vietnamese aide who worked at the school, but were unable to take part. It was suggested that the parents did not have time to take part in the study because of their long working hours. Radcliffe Primary School hosts a Khmer-English bilingual program funded by the State and taught by a bilingual Cambodian teacher. The Kuhn and Kha families, who are involved in the program agreed through an interpreter to be in the study. This added a new and important dimension to the study, as it enabled us to observe literacy practices in the children's mother tongue in the school context.

In the selection of families from Countrytown, Rhydwen points out that although more that 50% of the children have non-English speaking ancestry, fewer than 50% are from NESB. In fact there are only two families in which the children speak English as their second language. Furthermore, although a quarter of the children at Countrytown Primary are Nyoongars, none of these families were willing to be interviewed. Finally,

Thérèse Carr invited Karen Binayi, with whom she had worked in Blue Creek, to take part in the study. Karen agreed but suggested that *either a non-Aboriginal family or a more town oriented family be included as well.* Unfortunately time and resources did not allow us to take up this suggestion.

The selection process raises a number of issues about how families identify themselves in relation to NESB, the problems of identification through an 'outsider', and why some families were unable or chose not to take part in the study. Having selected the families the language used in the interview, the gender, ethnicity and status of the interviewer and the framing of the questions all impinge not only upon the family responses, but on what the participants are willing to discuss in relation to literacy practices. These issues are discussed in Chapter 2.

Language profiles of the ten families identified as NESB

Tables 2a and 2b, below, identify the range of languages used within and across families. Analysis reveals that for many of the families identified as NESB, English is very much part of their background. Parents in seven of the ten families who were identified as NESB have all in fact grown up speaking, reading and writing in English either as part of a multilingual community, through their education, or through contact with an English speaking community. A more detailed analysis is required to uncover the complex interplay between the language, context and purpose of literacy practices as speakers make decisions about the choices available.

Table 2a: Languages used by Rural 'NESB' Family Members

FAMILIES	SPOKEN	READ	WRITTEN
Mr Jackson	Malay English	Malay English	? ?
Mrs Jackson	Malay English	Malay English	Malay English
Ali Jackson (15)	Malay English Arabic	English Arabic	No English ?
Dawi Jackson (11)	Malay English Arabic	English Arabic	English
Abdul Jackson (9)	Malay English Arabic	English Arabic	English

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Table 2a continued

FAMILIES	SPOKEN	READ	WRITTEN
Mr George	Malay English Arabic	Malay English Arabic	? English ?
Mrs George	Malay English Arabic?	? ? ?	? ? ?
Siti George (15)	Malay English Arabic	Malay English Arabic	? English ?
Hatini George (12)	Malay English Arabic	Malay English Arabic	? English ?
Mrs Milardovic	Italian English	? English	? English
Mr Milardovic	Croatian English	? No	? No
Sophie Milardovic (10)	English Italian (FW)	English No	English No
Manders- Gunn	English		
Karen Binayi.	Jaru Kriol Walmajarri Kukatja Warlpiri English	English	English
Laurie Binayi (12)	NSD English Jaru Kriol English	English Jaru	English Jaru words
David Binayi (9)	Jaru Kriol English	English	English
Kerston Binayi (4)	Jaru Kriol English	English	English
Bessie	Jaru Warlpiri Kukatja Kriol English	English	English

Table 2b: Languages used by Urban 'NESB' family members

FAMILIES	SPOKEN	READ	WRITTEN
Mrs Ling	Hainanese Cantonese English	Mandarin Cantonese English	Mandarin Cantonese English
Mr Ling	Cantonese English	Cantonese English	Cantonese English
Felicity Ling (13)	Cantonese English Mandarin *	No English Mandarin *	No English Mandarin *
Paul Ling (12)	Cantonese English Mandarin *	No English Mandarin *	No English Mandarin *
John Ling (7)	Cantonese English	No English	No English
Mrs Wong	Mandarin Several Chinese Dialects Malay English	Mandarin Malay English	Mandarin Malay English
Mr Wong	Mandarin Malay English	English Mandarin English	English Mandarin English
Cath. Wong (11)	Mandarin English	Mandarin English	Mandarin English
Clare Wong (10)	Mandarin English		
Sara Barnes	Indonesian English	Indonesian English	? ?
Allan Barnes	English Indonesian	English Indonesian	English Indonesian
Anna Barnes (11)	Indonesian English	Indonesian English	? English
Jane Barnes (7)	Indonesian English	No English	No English
Julian Barnes (5)	Indonesian English	No English	No English

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Table 2b continued

Mr Kuhn	Khmer English	Khmer English	Kmer English
Mrs Kuhn	Khmer English (FW)		
Thy Kuhn (11)	Khmer English	Khmer English	Khmer English
Em Kuhn (9)	Khmer English	Khmer English	Khmer English
Joshua Kuhn (6)	Khmer English	Khmer English	Khmer English
Mr Kha	Khmer English	Khmer English	Khmer English
Mrs Kha	Khmer English (FW)		
Bopha Kha (12)	Khmer English	Khmer English	Khmer English
Sambath Kha (7)	Khmer English	Khmer English	Khmer English

Families who include English in their language background

Karen Binayi identifies herself as Aboriginal and lives in a Jaru community with her extended family in Blue Creek. The family speak a variety of languages which include Jaru, Walmajarri, Kukatja, Walpiri and English as well as non-standard varieties of English and Kriol. The choice of language involves the recognition of complex relationships between speakers, as well as the context of the interaction and personal preference. In terms of identity Jaru appears to be the most important language. Karen uses Jaru, Kriol and English with the children. Karen's grandmother, Bessie, uses Jaru as her *first and preferred language,* she uses Kriol with non-Jaru speakers. Laurie, Karen's eldest son speaks Jaru with Bessie at school when Bessie is teaching and in the wider community, especially in relation to *tucker.* At the interview, Thérèse used English as did the children, occasionally switching to Kriol.

Karen went to school in Perth and since leaving school has worked as a youth worker through the Catholic church, assisted at the local school and worked for the home maker service preparing and delivering meals. Karen has also been employed as a Language worker collecting oral histories and has co-authored a book about the Jaru language and culture. In addition to this Karen has trained for and worked as an electoral education officer for at least six years and more recently worked as a full time health worker with the local Aboriginal Medical Service. Karen is also an artist and has had work commissioned by local school.

Penelope Manders and Tom Gunn live in Countrytown with their children, Jinny, Michelle and Ruby. Penelope includes her son, who lives in Perth, and her sister as part of her family. She identifies herself as Nyoongar and was brought up from the age of seven to eighteen on a Baptist mission speaking English. All her children speak English. Penelope is a state enrolled nurse and is doing a pre-diploma course on Adult Aboriginal Health. Tom works for the WAMA developing employment strategies for Nyoongar people.

Mrs and Mr Ling are Chinese and grew up on Christmas Island. Mrs Ling spoke Hainanese at home, Cantonese in the wider community and learned to speak English at school. Mr Ling speaks Cantonese as his first language, and it has become the dominant language between Mr and Mrs Ling. Mrs Ling completed Year 10, gained a secretarial qualification and worked for a local company on Christmas Island. Mrs Ling works as a tailor from home and uses English to discuss clients design requirements. Mr Ling completed Year 10 and did a one year apprenticeship and two years' National Service. He worked in the Transport department in Karratha for 16 years but was made redundant at the beginning of the study.

Mr and Mrs Wong are of Chinese origin, and they grew up in Malaysia. They speak Mandarin as their first language as well as several Chinese dialects, and they learned to speak English at school. Mrs Wong has recently completed a degree in Financial Management and Economics, and she works at TAFE as a finance and budgeting officer. Mr Wong is an accountant and both parents use English as the main language of communication at work.

Azmi and Susan Jackson were brought up on Cocos. Malay is their mother tongue, and they learned English at school which they started at about age ten. They also read the Qur'an in Arabic and translate it into Malay. Susan worked as a dental nurse on Cocos but was dissatisfied by the conditions whereby she was paid in plastic coins, whereas Australians were paid in Australian currency. Susan and Azmi are employed at Countrytown meatworks as a night cleaner and slaughter worker respectively.

Sara Barnes is Indonesian and grew up speaking Indonesian and English. Allan Barnes learned English as his mother tongue in Australia where he grew up. He learned to speak Indonesian in Indonesia where he worked for 13 years as a geologist. He is currently studying at a local University and working from home. Sara Barnes is home maker and has responsibility for 'taking care' of the family.

Maria Milardovic came from an Italian family but was born in Australia and spoke Italian at home and English at school. Peter Milardovic grew up speaking Croatian in Croatia and learned English when he came to Australia at the age of twenty five in 1968. The Milardovic children all speak English as their first language. Maria looks after her sister's toddler and Peter works as a builder. Peter has just completed a new house for his family.

Clearly, once the researcher investigates the actual linguistic repertoires of families, the assumption that these families are from NESB is revealed as misleading. Many of

these parents grew up in multilingual contexts, in which English was one of the languages to which they had access. Sara Barnes and the Ling, Wong and Jackson parents were all literate to a greater or lesser extent in English before they came to Australia. Karen Binayi and Maria Milardovic grew up in multilingual and bilingual communities in Australia speaking English as part of their everyday interaction. Currently, many of these parents use English at home and in their employment.

The above profiles uncover a complex web of factors including cultural, linguistic and religious background, education, socio-economic status, and past and present employment, all of which impact upon the use of language and related literacy practices in a range of different ways.

Families who do not include English as part of their language background

In contrast to the above account, three of the ten families have had little contact with English before coming to Australia. Hairul George grew up in a Muslim family on Christmas Island and did not attend school regularly. Mrs George grew up on Cocos and did not go to school. Both Hairul and Mrs George speak Malay as their first language. Hairul's family came originally from Indonesia. He explained that the Malay spoken by the Christmas Islanders was once quiet different to that spoken on the mainland. However, today it is different: *That time Cocos not understand Malays Malay not understand Cocos. Today they understand already. Malays marry with our people, our people marry with Malays.* Both Hairul and his wife are employed in the meatworks where they mix with English speaking Australians.

Mr and Mrs Kuhn are from Cambodia, where they grew up speaking Khmer. They left Cambodia in 1979 and lived in Thai refugee camps for the next eight years before coming to Perth. Mr Kuhn worked as a farmer in Cambodia but is currently unemployed. Mrs Kuhn has responsibility for looking after the family. Mr and Mrs Kha also come from Cambodia and lived in refugee camps in Thailand for eight years before coming to Perth. Mr Kha worked as a farmer in Cambodia and both he and his wife are seasonal workers as strawberry pickers but are currently unemployed. Although both Mr Kuhn and Mr Kha appear to speak some English the families requested an interpreter for the interviews. Mrs Kuhn and Mrs Kha only speak a few words of English.

These families can be grouped in this way to show that the concept of NESB does not work as a categorising principle because it hides more than it reveals. The differences between these families all affect the choices and opportunities available to each family and, in turn, impact upon the way in which literacy practices are constructed in the home and community.

Language profiles of ESB families with diverse language backgrounds

In addition to the ten families identified as NESB, it also became apparent that four of the families classified as English speaking also had diverse linguistic backgrounds. Table 3, below, provides an insight into the linguistic resources of these families.

Table 3: Language diversity in "ESB" families

FAMILIES	LOCATION	SPOKEN	CONNECTION
Mrs O'Leary	Urban	English + Aboriginal words	
Mr O'Leary		English + Aboriginal words	
Liz O'Leary 12		English + Aboriginal words	
Tom O'Leary		English + Aboriginal words	
Mr Bauman		German English	Parents German
Mrs Caravaggio	Rural	Dutch English	Mother Dutch
Mr Caravaggio		English	Parents Italian
Mr Hendricksen		Dutch English	Parents Dutch

The O'Leary family identify themselves as Aboriginal and speak English but with Aboriginal words sprinkled through the language, mainly in public places when they don't want other people to know what they are saying. Although they have never spoken an Aboriginal language fluently, this has been passed down through generations. They encourage their children to use language in this way and remind them *don't ever forget it you know, because if it goes, it goes.* Anne Caravaggio came to Australia when she was nine and grew up speaking Dutch which she speaks only with her mother. Mr Hendricksen also grew up in Holland speaking Dutch before he came to Australia. John Caravaggio's grandparents were Italian and his father grew up speaking Italian, but English was the main form of communication when John was young. Finally, Mr Bauman grew up in Australia speaking German and English.

In these four families, English is the dominant language through which literacy practices are constructed. As with many second generation migrant families it seems that their mother tongue is almost extinguished and often only used as a means of communicating to older family members. This change in language from one generation to the next may have important consequences for the way in which literacy practices in these families are constructed. The next section examines the way in literacy practices are constructed by the families in our study who were originally classified as from NESB but are, in fact, bilingual or multilingual.

The relationship between literacy practices and the mother tongue

There is evidence to suggest that eight of the ten families feel that the maintenance and development of their mother tongue, spoken, read and written, is important, and in some cases crucial, as a means of maintaining communication within the family. The way in which this is pursued is different across families and a number of patterns can be identified. However there is also evidence to suggest that although all the children in these families have been brought up speaking their mother tongue (with the exception of the Manders-Gunn and Milardovic families), the children seem to be increasingly reluctant to use it once they start to speak English at school.

One of the key differences in relation to the construction of literacy practices through the mother tongue seems to be the place of this in the family as the means of communication. For example, in the Kha, Kuhn and George families the mother tongue is the dominant language used at home and in their immediate community. Mrs Kuhn and Mrs Kha only speak a few words of English and Mr Kuhn said that he occasionally spoke to the children in English in order to clarify what he was saying in their mother tongue so that the children *could understand.* For these families, the maintenance of their mother tongue appears to be fundamental to communication within the family especially in relation to their mothers, relatives and their immediate community.

As well as using their mother tongue for day-to-day communication in the home, these families are involved in a number of formal and informal literacy activities which are also conducted in their mother tongue. The Kuhn and Kha children attend an out-of school Cambodian program taught in Khmer, initiated and run by the Cambodian community. Although Mr Kuhn is involved in this program as a teacher, Thy Kuhn appears not to be interested in the activities of the Cambodian school and has other things to do. The younger children from the Kuhn and Kha families also attend a Khmer-English bilingual and biliteracy program. This is run as part of Radcliffe Primary School. The older siblings, who were not in the program, expressed some regret at having missed this opportunity.

The Ling, Barnes and Wong families also feel that their mother tongue is important for a variety of reasons including future employment, cultural understanding, communication with relatives, and visits to SE Asia. However, although all the children were brought up speaking their mother tongue in early childhood, in the Ling, Barnes, Wong, and to a lesser degree in the Jackson family, English is the dominant language of the home and the only language used at school. These families are also involved in literacy practices which support their mother tongue, but these do not appear to be central to everyday family interactions. For example, the Wongs and the Lings have withdrawn their children from a Saturday school organised by the Chun Wah, at the request of the children. Mrs Wong has subsequently employed a home tutor one evening a week to teach her children Catherine and Clare to speak, read and write in Mandarin. Although Catherine expressed some reluctance to learn Mandarin she said *well it's good for me* and later: *I want to know it but I just don't want to put up with*

learning it. It is interesting to note that Mrs Wong does not help her children with their Mandarin lessons. She explained that their teacher is

> a proper Mandarin teacher from China and I um.....it's not right apparently what I speak, wasn't true China English er Chinese, so I got bombed for that .... I tried to correct her you see..... so that's it, I'm staying out of them.

In addition to this, Mrs Wong has stopped speaking to Catherine and Anna in a Chinese dialect because she felt Catherine was getting *mixed up,* so they are concentrating on Mandarin. Mrs Ling is trying to encourage Felicity, Paul and John to use Cantonese at home, but has found that the children are reluctant to respond to her in Cantonese. Anna Barnes is teaching herself to re-learn Indonesian by reading books she has brought from Indonesia. Anna said she felt embarrassed about speaking Indonesian to her parents and it is interesting to note that Mr Barnes described Anna as being *very Australian.*

Susan and Azmir Jackson speak both English and Malay at home. Dawi, one of their four sons, said he speaks mostly English at home and speaks Malay only at Malay school which he attends at the weekend to learn about Islam. The classes are conducted in Malay. In addition to this the older boys go the Mosque to study the Qur'an in Arabic. They learn to read and write in Arabic and then have it translated into Malay. Ali speaks Malay but does not write it. Azmir and Susan commented on this, saying that their sons could not read Malay. Susan who reads Malay but not Arabic, laughed as she described their attempts to read Malay.

It is clear from this analysis that although a number of literacy practices are carried out in the children's mother tongue and appear to be an integral part of their world, serving important social, cultural and religious functions, several of the children are beginning to use their mother tongue less as they get older. This potential language loss and displacement of first language literacy has important consequences for the development of general and specific literacy practices during schooling.

Decisions about language use: the importance and relative value of English

Although there was a sense of regret about the children's reluctance to use their mother tongue, the choice of which languages to use reflected an on going dilemma for some families. It was clear that English literacy was seen unanimously as very important for a number of different reasons. For example, Mrs Wong deliberately chose to speak to her children in English just before they went to kindergarten *so they did not look stupid.* Mrs Ling talked about the importance of speaking English fluently: *easier for them as they grow older and face Western society, have to fit in...* Mr Kuhn felt it is important to speak English as they are living in an English speaking country. In the Kha family, despite the bilingual program, English is the crucial link between home and school. Bopha plays a major role in mediating the culture and language of the school. She acts as translator of messages and conveyer of instructions, deciding how much information

and in what form it is to be given to her parents. English literacy was also mentioned as important in terms of dietary requirement by the George family.

Some families mentioned home literacy practices which were designed specifically to help children learn English. Mrs Ling urges her children to use a dictionary when reading, to help their understanding and use of particular words and increase their vocabulary. Mrs Wong talks to Catherine about the grammatical and graphological differences between Mandarin and English. Mr and Mrs Barnes feel that speaking *good* English is very important. Anna Barnes is aware of this and commented that she often *mixes up* English tenses and was practicing their correct use through speaking and writing. Mr Barnes asked her to talk to him about any words she was not sure about and in addition to this said that *the penalty in this house for dropping an h was to spell the word five times.*

Added to the children's reluctance to use their mother tongue are parents and children's perception of their use of English, as evidenced by the children's comments on their own and parents' use and pronunciation of particular forms of English. Mr Kuhn explained that his daughters discouraged him from using English by saying *oh father, dad you talk doesn't make sense* and *oh okay Pa, stop it.* Mr Kuhn identified another dilemma in relation to language choice. Some of his co-workers do not like other workers to speak in Malay and yet, if Mr Kuhn speaks in English, he is concerned that he will not be able to make himself understood.

Mrs Ling explained that her children sometimes tease her and say *mum you don't pronounce properly you speaks funny.* Mrs Wong said that her children correct her English and her Mandarin, but she does not mind. In addition to this, Mrs Ling, Sara Barnes and Mr Kuhn all talked about their perceived inadequacies in their own use of English.

In the Binayi family Karen commented on a child's use of Kriol apparently used in the wrong context, using the term 'pidgin' to suggest that the child did not know how to use English. There was also some uneasiness or embarrassment about use of Kriol around non-Kriol speakers. This seemed to be because the use of Kriol in this context suggested a lack of knowledge of English.

In the above sections I have tried to identify some of the factors which appear to influence decisions about language use in each family. These factors include the perceived status of different languages by both children and parents, the role of each language in relation to everyday communication, the perception of English as a means of achieving success and the relationship between particular languages and religious practices. The following sections explore the construction of particular literacy practices.

The construction of literacy practices:

Religion

Religion seems to be a significant source of literacy sites for many of the families. Religious practices are conducted in either the mother tongue, English, the mother tongue and English, or in Arabic and translated into Malay.

Mrs Ling and Felicity, Paul and John attend Church every Sunday and follow up the lesson through a study book which has questions related to a particular Scripture. Mrs Ling encourages the children to take a note book to *jot down notes and record anything that speaks to you and then use this to apply in your life.* Catherine and Clare Wong go to religious education classes one evening a week to learn about Catholicism, which involves doing follow up work at home. The Kuhn family attend a Church and a Bible study group once a week. The Bible is translated into Khmer and is read and interpreted, after prayers, at least once a day. On special occasions the Kha family go to the Buddhist temple and Mr Kha prays at home.

The George and the Jackson families study the Qur'an. Mr George teaches the Qur'an to the local children as well as his two daughters. Both families explained that the Qur'an is read in Arabic and translated into Malay to help understand the meaning. Reading and learning the Qur'an appears to play a significant part in their lives and to some extent determines with whom the children will mix.

One of the key differences between these literacy practices is the relationship of the reader to the text. Each text requires a particular way of working which relates to procedures to be followed when reading the text as well as forms of interaction with the text. For example, reading the Bible seems to involve interpretation of scriptural passages and discussion of their application to everyday life. It also involves other literacy practices as the children are expected to complete questions in a study book related to each lesson. The Scripture is chosen according to the 'message' for that week. Thus the role of the reader is an active one in which the text is open to interpretation and discussion. In contrast to this the Qur'an is read through the recitation of Arabic script. The reader advances by chanting though a series of 'books' in the Qur'an and then going back to the beginning. Thus the reader is taking a different role in the sense that spiritual fulfilment lies in the ability to recite the Qur'an in Arabic rather than understand the meaning of the passages.

Homework

Homework is virtually a universal practice in all the families discussed in this chapter, with the exception of Laurie Binayi who does not receive any homework. Several of the families stress the importance of homework and encourage the children to work independently and strive for 'good' marks and 'correct' results. Several parents believe that homework should take precedence over television and other activities, and it is often done as part of a routine on which other activities depend. For example, some

children are not allowed to watch television until their homework is completed. Parents also supervise homework to a greater or a lesser extent and most of the children in each family also appear to take their homework seriously and strive to complete it. However, differences between the families seem to lie in the type and amount of support parents give to homework.

Mrs Ling, Mr Barnes, Mr and Mrs Wong, Penelope Manders-Gunn, Maria Milardovic and Susan Jackson and her eldest son, all help their children in a number of ways with their homework. These include providing resource materials (encyclopedias and project books), reading up on the subjects under study, giving guidance about presentation, giving children access to word processing facilities, discussing the process rather than giving the answer, suggesting ways of finding relevant information and ensuring that tasks are completed. Even though not all these parents feel confident in their own abilities to help, especially with the older children, they are able to suggest alternative strategies. These include talking to the teacher, asking older siblings and establishing networks of support. For example Mrs Ling advised Felicity *to ask university students who attended the same Church.* Mrs Barnes felt that she could not help the children with homework because she could not read English very well, but was confident that her husband organised and managed the children's homework. Mrs Ling explained that Mr Ling only reads with their youngest son because he wants to be involved in their homework but *he thinks he's worse than me.*

In contrast to this Mr Kha and Mr Kuhn ask about and to some extent supervise homework and try to ensure that the younger children do their reading homework. Nevertheless, it seemed that these parents do not become directly involved with homework from school. Em Kuhn commented that she did not always bring her work home because she *didn't have people at home to help her with it.* Thy Kuhn, when asked to produce his test file, said that he had lost it, and when asked if his father has seen it he responded by shaking his head.

These differences in approaches to homework seem to reflect to some extent the requirement of English as the means for completing the assignment, the children's perception of their parents' ability to help, parental access to support systems and resources materials and, in Thy Kuhn's case, his apparent disillusionment and struggle with school.

Story telling, reading and writing

As we have seen, a substantial number of literacy practices are constructed through religion, homework and attempts to maintain and develop the mother tongue. The language used in each practice is dictated by the context and nature of the activity. It seems that all of the families to a greater or lesser extent are involved in other literacy practices as part of their everyday interactions. However it is possible to identify some patterns which relate to who is involved in these literacy practices, what types of texts are produced and read, and the way in which certain texts are valued.

The number of books in each family varies tremendously. However, this cannot be used as a basis for assumptions about the quality or quantity of reading in individual families. But this may have implications in terms of access to texts and experience of print before going to school. Most of the older children have access to texts, even though Bopha Kha said *I haven't any book at home* and continued *I only got Atlas that I won*, she brings books from the school library and visits the local library for books related to school projects as well as reading *ghost stories, vampires* for leisure and learning to read and write in Khmer. A wide range of texts were evident and the children's reading included comics, religious texts, fiction and non-fiction.

As far as it is possible to tell, only texts connected with the two bilingual programs, religion and mother tongue classes are in languages other than English. The older children mainly read English scripted texts with the exception of Anna Barnes, who occasionally reads an Indonesian story in Indonesian.

If there is a difference between the older children it seems to lie in their perception of texts. For example Thy Kuhn said that he does not like reading or writing and prefers to draw or play, although he does occasionally bring books home from the school library. In contrast to this some of the children are avid readers, consuming a number of texts each week.

The literacy experiences of the younger children also seem to vary. For example, the young children in the Kuhn family do not have any books of their own and although they have access to books they prefer to play rather than to read. Selecting specific texts for the younger children and engaging in specific reading rituals seems to be a feature of the Barnes, Ling and Binayi family practices. Both context and time seem to be part of reading rituals. For example certain times are identified as 'reading' times and particular story reading procedures are evident. Mrs Milardovic deliberately taught her children to read before they went to school. In addition to this oral story telling seems to form an important part of cultural practices for both the Binayi and Kuhn families. Evidence suggests that some of these practices may relate to school practices more than others. In addition to this, some children may be more familiar with particular types and aspects of print than others are before going to school.

Some families seem to monitor the type of reading material their children choose and make judgements about the relative value of different types of texts. Mrs Ling encourages her children to read 'books' rather than comics telling them that *you can't learn anything from a cartoon.* She also insists that John, who loves to buy books, reads them and does not use them just to fill up his book shelves. Mr Barnes assumes that books from school are *suitable* and comments to the children on any he thinks are not. He also monitors books the children want to buy from the book club. Mr Barnes also commented that he knows what the children are reading because they discuss the text being read. Mrs Wong said that the children *cannot just pick book off the shelf because I know what they read.* Thus there is an expectation in some families that texts can be shared and discussed as a means of eliciting understanding as well as rendering some texts as more valid than others.

Many parents expressed their enjoyment in reading, with the exception of Mrs Kha and Mrs Kuhn who do not read. Practices include reading for recreational purposes, work related purposes, further study and to learn English. For example, Mr Kha reads an English / Khmer dictionary to help him learn English and Mr George reads both Malay and English newspapers although he can not always understand the English text. He also enjoys reading martial arts magazines which his elder daughter translates. Karen Binayi likes reading magazines and borrowed a collection of boyhood stories told by a Walmajarri man, written in English by a Kimberley author. Sara Barnes reads novels written in Indonesian because she finds these easier to read than novels in English. Mrs Ling, Mrs Wong and Sara Barnes all read Australian magazines and novels. Mr Kuhn has a number of books and reads religious and theological texts in both Malay and English. The Manders-Gun, the Wongs, Mr Barnes and Karen Binayi all read texts related to their employment and further study.

Writing seems to revolve around homework, religious practices and the parents employment or studying. For some children writing seems to an integral part of their everyday world. For example Penelope Manders writes *a lot*, including letters to friends and assignments from her course. Catherine and Clare Wong write in Mandarin as part of their Mandarin lessons and are encouraged to write their diaries and write to their cousins in Mandarin, as well as observing their mother studying for a degree. Karen Binayi has been involved in a range of work practices that involve literacy and studies away from home occasionally. It is common practice for Anna, Jane and Julian Barnes to write notes to ask their father if they can watch a particular television program. In addition to this, Allan Barnes works from home and is studying. All these practices seem to demonstrate to the children the importance of literacy as a means of 'getting things done' and being 'successful'.

This contrasts with families in which writing does not seem to be central to their lives and some families where the completion of particular bureaucratic or educational tasks is done through an interpreter or through consultation with a friend, relation or official. Mr Kuhn does not really like writing but writes to his family in Cambodia. Chanthan explained that the Kuhn *children like to read more than writing ... they rarely do write. They don't like writing.* Mr George gets help with filling in tax forms from his niece. In addition to this, drawing also seems to be an import practice in the Binayi and Kuhn families. Laurie Binayi enjoys drawing with charcoal on the floors and Thy Kuhn is a talented artist and would like to be an artist when he grows up.

In the above sections, I have tried to identify some of the factors which appear to influence decisions about language use in each family. These factors include the perceived status of different languages by both children and parents, the role of each language in relation to everyday communication, the perception of English as a means of achieving success, and the relationship between particular languages and religious practices. The following sections explore the construction of particular literacy practices.

Media

For many families, television is an important source of information about events in 'home' countries. It is also a source of enjoyment and relaxation through the mother tongue. The Kha and Kuhn families watch programs about Cambodia on SBS. They also enjoy watching videos from Cambodia. Mr. George watches films which his daughters translate and videos with Malay subtitles which he can read. For some families watching television is a shared event in which particular programs or videos are chosen. For example, the Binayi extended family all got together to watch a film. The Ling and Wong families encourage their children to watch and discuss and current affairs and documentaries. Mrs Wong feels that it is important to watch documentaries on other countries and she always tries to tell them how privileged they are, how good times are here. In addition to the above preferences many of the families seem to watch soap operas and quiz shows and many of the children enjoy cartoons.

There seem to be marked differences between families with respect to the regulation of television viewing, in that some families control, monitor and limit what is being watched, while for others the television forms a backdrop to other activities. In addition to this not all children enjoy watching television. Catherine Wong prefers to read and Ali Jackson only watches if there is nothing else to do.

Very few families commented on the radio, apart from the Jacksons who sometimes listen on Saturday morning when requests are played, *including ones for Malay music*. However, the local radio station in Countrytown seems to be an important source of communication. Hairul George explained that radio announcements about the meatworks are often made in relation to returning to work and so it is important to listen to it every day.

School involvement

Several of the parents are involved in school activities. Penelope Manders and Karen Binayi are very involved with their children's schools and are members of their respective ASSPA committees. Karen Binayi's grandmother, Bessie, is involved in teaching in an Aboriginal Culture and Language program. Mr. Kuhn is involved in the bilingual program at the school and goes to all the parents meetings. In contrast to this the Wong, Barnes and Ling parents are not directly involved in the school but will approach the school if there is a problem. Mrs Ling also said she would like to help in the year 2 to see what John is doing and what goes on. These parents attend formal school functions and read and discuss reports but leave the 'teaching' to the school. One of the key differences among them seems to be who initiates involvement and sets the agenda.

In contrast to this Mr Kha and Mr Kuhn go to the bilingual classroom and attend parent meetings, but tend not to approach the rest of the school. However, this is in marked contrast to the time and energy spent by Mr Kha and Mr Kuhn on literacy activities connected with the Cambodian school and other events. Mr Kuhn teaches in the

Cambodian school at the weekend, Mr Kha helps with homework from the Cambodian School, while Mr George teaches the Qur'an to his two daughters. Once again, language seems to be a mediating factor. Mr Kha and Mr Kuhn are only involved in 'school' contexts in which Khmer is the dominant language.

Parental aspirations

It is very striking that several of the families have clear plans about their children's future. There are definite plans for future schools and even future careers. It is also clear that some parents have the resources to ensure that their children can carry out these plans. Anna Barnes will go to a private college and board if the family has to go back to Indonesia for employment. Karen Binayi's mother is thinking about sending another daughter away to school in Perth so *she could learn something.* Mrs Wong is planning to send Catherine to a private Catholic school because she feels there is more discipline, and both Catherine and Clare are attending Catholic instruction classes. Although professionally qualified, Mrs Wong feels that the development of particular skills is more important than a qualification as this is no guarantee of a job.

In addition to this the Ling, Jackson and Kha parents all commented that they encourage the children to study hard as they don't want them to be like them in terms of education and employment. Mrs Ling said she will not push the children but clearly had high expectations and talked about her eldest daughters ambition to be the first woman judge. The Jacksons hope that their children will go away to university. Penelope Manders also expects her children to finish high school and go on to university. Mrs Milardovic said that, although she does not want the children to leave home to go to university, she encourages them to study hard and gives them the choice. Her two oldest children are at university.

In contrast to this, Mr George feels that his daughters will not work in the meat works because they *spoke well.* What seems to be important is to finish year 12 if possible and to *marry right.* Mr Kha does not have any specific ambitions, and he said that it is *up to the children what they want to do.* The Kha family tease Sambath about wanting to be a policeman. Em Kuhn stated that she would like to be a nurse, make lots of money and help people, working in a job that isn't dangerous.

The differences in aspirations and the resources to carry them out clearly impact upon the children's perceptions of what is valued and the choices they have in accessing certain types of education and future careers.

School literacy practices

Several studies have identified proficiency in English as a major determinant of school success (Sturman, 1985., Marsh, 1988.). There is evidence to suggest that many of the older children who do not speak English as their first language are already becoming fluent English speakers. This is evidenced through their ability to discuss the research

project and methodology, to convey complex concepts about family and individual literacy practices, to act as translators when necessary and to explain the intricate interrelationships between language choice and literacy practices. From the snapshots of literacy practices we were able to observe and document in school, it seems that many of the school literacy practices focus on aspects of English literacy, including skill development, meta-linguistic awareness, and interpretation and construction of text. When these practices are examined in more detail a number of issues related to the way in which the child's world is being constructed through literacy practices become apparent.

First there seems to be limited recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity represented in wider Australian society as well as within particular schools. With the exception of the Cambodian bilingual program, there was very little evidence of the languages the children spoke at home and in their wider community. In the practices observed, texts mainly featured Anglo-Celtic characters and the vast majority are in English. In addition to this, although languages other than English are offered through a LOTE program, these do not necessarily relate to the community languages of pupils attending the schools.

Second, evidence suggests that many of the teachers in our study used similar literacy practices derived from what has been termed a 'whole language approach' to literacy, supported by in-service courses to help teachers implement the *First Steps* program. Although this program has been well received and provides a way of helping teachers to map children's progress and develop a range of literacy strategies, the associated literacy practices developed by some teachers do not appear to take account of individual needs of some children or cultural differences between them. The homogeneous nature of many of the learning and teaching styles which require a particular cultural orientation, may therefore disadvantage students who do not share the culture-specific ways of working with text nor the learning styles assumed by the approach.

Third, there is some evidence to suggest that some of the children who are communicating in more than one language are not coping very well at school. For example, Thy Kuhn seemed confused and then disillusioned with some of the tasks he was asked to do and this resulted in him giving up or not attempting them at all. One of the consequences of this seems to be lack of real development in literacy in either English or Khmer. In addition, most of the literacy assessments seemed to be carried out in English, so the children are being judged only in relation to one aspect of their linguistic repertoire.

Fourth, although clearly no texts are neutral, there is evidence that some texts constructed an explicit view of the world that may lead to stereotypical and damaging views of particular groups as well as creating a partisan view of certain historical events. This was demonstrated in relation to references to *dark people*, Christopher Columbus as the person who *discovered America*, and James Cook being *murdered by Hawaiian Islanders*. Many of the references to Aboriginal peoples were often negative and derogatory. For example, there was reference to *John Forrest being attacked by*

Aborigines in Esperance, and in another class the children read a story made by the older children about *how the emu didn't like being chased by the Aborigines with their throwing spears.* In another story, *Blinky Bill* complains about Aboriginal people hunting: *Just as well for you Mr Wombat that there are no Aborigines here!*

Clearly, the children's perception of these texts will depend upon their own background and the teachers' use of them. However, the question still remains about the messages children are receiving from the use and interpretation of certain texts. Clare Wong's reluctance to go to Malaysia for a holiday, Anna Barnes' assertion that she is Australian and Francesca and Sophie Milardovic's intentional anglicisation of their name perhaps illustrate some of the outcomes.

In contrast to the above observations, there is evidence to suggest that there is a direct attempt to *relate* the language and culture of the wider community to the school at Radcliffe Primary, Yabby Creek and Countrytown Pre-Primary. This is evident through the development of bilingual programs and in teacher knowledge of the wider community, as well as the use and development of resources that reflect particular cultural backgrounds. In addition to this, Redlands Primary has an Aboriginal liaison officer and Vietnamese aide and Mr Chanthan is employed at Radcliffe Primary as an interpreter, assisting teachers in K-7 classrooms. However, resources are scarce and the teachers have the main responsibility for producing and developing appropriate materials. As a consequence of this, many of the texts in the Radcliffe bilingual classrooms consist of hand written texts placed on top of the English script, raising questions about the relative status of particular scripts. Finally, it is interesting to note that the aim of the Cambodian bilingual program is to ease the transition from home to school, develop literacy skills in Khmer and English, raise the children's self-esteem and provide a 'bridge' to year three. However, there does not seem to be any opportunity for the program to be extended at the present time.

Literacy at what cost?

Although, on the surface, some of the families appear to be similar in terms of cultural, religious and linguistic background it seems apparent that there are some significant differences between them which impact upon literacy practices. The George and the Jackson family exemplify these differences. Both families are Malay speaking Muslims from Christmas Island and Cocos Island, they wear traditional clothing as worn by Malay Muslims and both parents work at the Meatworks in Countrytown. Literacy practices within the family also appear to be quite similar. Many literacy practices revolve around learning about Islam and reading the Qur'an. A variety of texts are evident in each family and television and radio are used as a form of entertainment and information in both families. In addition to this, English literacy is seen as important. Although Mrs George speaks very little English and Mr George is developing his literacy skills in English (in contrast to Susan and Ali Jackson who learned to speak English at school), the children in both families are fluent English speakers.

However, the difference between the families seems to lie in the parents' view of their children's future. In a discussion about his daughters' future, Hairul George said he wants them to continue until year 12 if they can. *If she cannot go we cannot do anything else.* Hairul is not sure about their future employment but mentioned that he didn't really want his daughters to work in the meatworks *Because they are... can talk well.* It appears that marriage is an important consideration in terms of their future. Hairul said that his daughters *maybe going to find a job first and then after that maybe ... I don't know ... Of course people must be married right.* Hatini said she had no idea what she wanted to be when she grew up and had no interest in anything else except modelling which she does not think she will be allowed to do.

In contrast to this both parents and older children in the Jackson family have a very specific view of what they want in the future. Azmi warns his children that if they don't work hard at school and succeed they will *end up like your dad, sitting at home unemployed.* He hopes that the children will go on to further education or be successful at school in order to get a job when they leave. Dawi Jackson said he will probably leave Countrytown and go and live in city, becoming a doctor or a lawyer. There seems to be a gender dimension to the aspirations of each family. The boys in the Jackson family seem to be expected to plan in order to take responsibility for providing for their future wives and children. Education and employment is seen as the way to achieve this. Whereas to some extent ensuring a *right* marriage seems to be the way in which Siti and Hatini's future will be secured.

The Milardovic and the Ling Family families seem very different on the surface in terms of linguistic and cultural background and migrant status. However, closer examination reveals some interesting similarities. Although the parents in these two families are bilingual (Milardovics) and multi-lingual (Lings) all the children use English as their dominant language. Neither family are involved in community groups and each family tends to do things as a discrete group occasionally involving their extended family. Mrs Ling and Maria Milardovic both have prime responsibility as home makers. It is the women in the families who take responsibility for supporting the children's homework, as both men feel their English literacy skills are inadequate. Both Maria Milardovic and Mrs Ling feel that education is very important and spend a great deal of time and energy at home with the children supporting their literacy development. Both families have high aspirations for their children, although Mrs Ling does not want to 'push' them, maintaining that it is important for them to be happy and Maria Milardovic feels it is important that her children have some choice in their future education.

I have tried to show how the families are constructing a range of literacy practices through the complex interplay between language choice, culture and context. The rich repertoire that the children draw on at home, and in some cases in the wider community, does not appear to be accessed through school literacy practices. This appears to be the case for particular activities, for example story telling, as well as the languages through which literacy practices are constructed. On the other hand, activities which appear on the surface to be context specific, for example the recitation of the Qur'an, may in fact be procedurally similar to some classroom literacy rituals.

The range of literacy practices seems to some extent to reflect the parents' literacy experiences in their mother tongue and in English, which in turn are reflected in early socialisation practices. Some of these practices, for example involvement in oral story telling, exposure to and use of written texts, appear to be recognised and valued in relation to school literacy practices more than others.

Level of English also seems important in relation to being able to support children's school literacy practices; however what seems to be equally, if not more, significant is parents' access to resources and networks which they can call upon for support.

There seems to be a relationship in some families between literacy practices and future aspirations. This is reflected in parents' relationships with the schools, the relative importance of homework, the use of particular activities to promote specific types of literacy practices, and the preparation through particular literacy practices for secondary education.

Our study of bilingual and multilingual families suggests that parents face a continuing dilemma about cultural and linguistic choices which seem to be irreconcilable. On the one hand many parents see English oracy and literacy as the means of attaining a 'good' education, a necessary condition of living in Australia, and the path to a particular future. As exemplified by Mr Jackson: *It's not very important for us to speak Malay here because we have to push our kids to speak English so that can get a good job set up for themselves in the future.*

Although 'culture' is constantly changing to accommodate the needs of different groups in a changing world, the loss of language by definition may involve the loss of the 'cultural' which potentially enriches and gives access to multiple readings of the world. This is expressed by Mrs Ling by her comment when *in Rome do as the Romans do.* Yet she intends to teach her children specific customs before their grandparents arrive so they are not offended. Furthermore, loss of the mother tongue may mean a gradual breakdown in communication between one generation and the next.

Finally, there is evidence to suggest that, where parents are trying to support the mother tongue, children seem to be actively resisting this. English has become their dominant language appearing to displace their mother tongue. The reasons for this development can only be speculated upon, although parents on the one hand strive to ensure their children *fit in* (Mrs Ling) and children on the other hand see English valued and used exclusively in school. For some children, the consequences of this seem disturbing.

The consequences of the displacement of language and culture can be seen to some extent in some of the families in this study. The Milardovic, Hendricksen, Caravaggio and Bauman families have all decided to bring their children up speaking English. For Thy Kuhn the consequences may already be emerging as he seems unable to gain support from home or school in Khmer or English and, as a result, seems to be becoming semi-lingual and semi-literate. Many of the other children are clearly becoming fluent in English oracy and literacy. However, the future of their own linguistic resources and cultural heritage is open to speculation.

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CHAPTER 5
SOCIAL CLASS AND FAMILY LITERACY PRACTICES

William Louden

Introduction

The starting point for our case studies of family literacy practices was a set of differences based on community location: whether the families lived in urban or rural environments. For this reason, we chose to structure the selection of case study families to represent the range of urban and rural locations in Western Australia. Half of the participating families were to be recruited in the Perth metropolitan area and the other half were to be recruited from a medium-sized country town, a smaller farming community on the margin of the arable agricultural area, and a remote community with a majority population of Aboriginal people. As we began planning to recruit families to represent the range of geographical community contexts, we bore in mind some of the other sets of differences that seem to distinguish families. In particular, we chose to attend to sets of difference based on family language background and our expectations about social class. This chapter reports on our experience of literacy practices and social class differences among our case study families. It begins with a discussion of the reasons for considering social class in the study, describes the relationship between class and location in selection of the case study families, and then considers the evidence the study provides on the relationship between social class and family literacy practices.

Why Consider Social Class Differences?

At least three reasons may be advanced for our decision to attempt to structure social class differences into the selection of families participating in the study. The first reason concerns the quantitative research literature on students' school performance, which consistently reports a relationship between social class and performance (see, for example, Walberg & Tsai, 1985). Such measures of school performance usually consider reading, writing and mathematics. Although there is also some international evidence of relatively poorer performance in rural schools, these differences do not seem to be uniform (Garden & Livingstone, 1989; Elley, 1992). In reading, for example, urban-rural differences occurred predominantly in less developed countries such as Slovenia, Hungary, Greece and Portugal, Trinidad-Tobago, Indonesia and Venezuela. Rural-urban differences in reading were negligible in several of the more

highly developed countries such as Finland, Sweden, Denmark, Belgium and the United States, and in favour of rural schools in France, Switzerland and New Zealand (Elley, 1992, pp. 62-64). Moreover, recent Australian research suggests a much stronger relationship between social class and school performance than rural or urban location and school performance. Considering a state-wide Western Australian sample of achievement in reading, writing and mathematics, the Monitoring Standards in Education Project concluded:

> While the location of the school had a small but statistically significant effect on student performance, there was a much stronger socio-economic effect. That is, students from higher socio-economic areas consistently outperformed students from lower socio-economic areas. (Western Australia, 1993a, p. 8)

The second reason for attempting to structure selection of case study families around our preconceptions of social class differences relates to the international literature on family literacy practices. One strand of this research has examined literacy practices among different social groups (Chall & Snow, 1982; Heath, 1983) leading to the conclusion that "children whose home literacy practices most closely resemble school literacy practices are more successful in school" (Auerbach, 1989, p.167). Another, related, strand of research has considered the relationship between parental involvement and school performance. In a review of this literature, Morrow & Paratore (1993) concluded that "practices such as shared reading, reading aloud, making a variety of print materials available, and promoting positive attitudes toward literacy have been found to have a significant impact on children's literacy learning" (1993, p.194). Auerbach (1989) provides a complementary list of forms of parent involvement in schooling, including "creating a home atmosphere conducive to learning, responding to school communications, helping at school, performing academic tasks with children, and working in parent advisory groups" (1989, p. 168). If these particular family literacy practices and patterns of parent involvement in schooling were are associated with social class differences (see Wells, 1986, pp. 134-136, for example) it might be argued that the differences in family literacy practices actually *cause* the widely observed social class differences in student performance.

These two empirical reasons for considering social class in the study - the relationship between social class and student outcomes, and the relationship between parents' behaviour, social class and student outcomes - are complemented by a third argument for attending to social class differences in literacy practices. Commissioned Australian studies of literacy and schooling, it seems, rarely deal with the hard facts of class inequalities in educational outcomes. Freebody (1993), for example, cites the case of a commissioned report on educational standards in the state of Victoria (McGaw, *et al*, 1989) which spends some 80 pages discussing barely significant gender differences in reading, writing and mathematics, and submerges in an appendix evidence of a much stronger relationship between school performance and social class. Similarly, the published analysis of a Western Australian study of school performance (Western Australia, 1993b) carefully compares performance by gender, language background and Aboriginality but makes no comment on social class differences. Only later, when a parliamentary committee on rural education began to ask uncomfortable questions about

urban-rural differences was an analysis of social class differences prepared in an internal working document (Western Australia, 1993a). The apparent urban-rural differences in the data, this report argued, were largely due to differences in the proportion of lower socioeconomic status students in rural schools. Whatever the reason may be for avoiding social class as a research category, it seems that evidence of first language and gender differences is much more palatable than evidence of social class differences in school performance.

Schools, Families and Social Class Differences

Notwithstanding the apparent clarity of the evidence on school performance and class differences, the study was not commissioned as a study of social class and literacy. The primary category for selection of families was urban or rural location. The original outline of this study called for twelve urban and twelve rural families. Six community locations were selected: three in the Perth metropolitan area and three in the country. In addition, we planned to represent a variety of language backgrounds and social class conditions through these communities. Social class differences in the school intake areas are represented by whether or not the schools were included in one of the Commonwealth government's programs of support for disadvantaged schools in 1993: the Disadvantaged Schools Program or the Priority Country Areas Program. Chapter 4 of this report has provided an account of the range of language backgrounds among families in the study. A brief outline of each the six communities and their schools appears below.

Windsor Park Primary School, like many other schools in Australia's sprawling suburbs, serves a recently established and economically advantaged community. Twenty years ago, the land was a pine plantation on the edge of the metropolitan area: now it is occupied by several thousand families living in single dwellings with a median value of almost double the median price of all Perth homes. Forty percent of the school population comes from non-English speaking backgrounds, many of them first generation immigrants from Asia.

Redlands and Radcliffe Primary Schools are suburban schools which draw funds from the Disadvantaged Schools Program. Both schools serve neighbourhoods which include some privately owned single dwellings, many single dwellings rented from the state housing authority, and a sprinkling of multi-story apartment blocks provided by the state housing authority for low income earners. Both schools include substantial minorities of students from non-English speaking backgrounds.

Countrytown is a community of less than 5,000 persons in a wheat and sheep farming area in the South-West corner of Australia. Countrytown has two government primary schools - Countrytown and Highglen - and a small Catholic primary school. In 1993, when we collected the data, one of the two government schools was classified as Disadvantaged. Countrytown Primary, which has received additional funding from the Disadvantaged Schools Program for many years, is the older of the two government schools. Three families were drawn from Countrytown Primary. The second

government school, Highglen Primary, was not funded through the Disadvantaged Schools Program. Situated in an area known locally as "Nob's Hill", which includes some affluent private housing as well as some publicly provided housing mainly occupied by Aboriginal people, Highglen was locally regarded as the higher status government school. About ten percent of the students in both Countrytown Primary and Highglen come from a Malay background. Twenty five percent of the children at Countrytown identify as Aboriginal; fewer than fifteen percent of the students at Highglen identify as Aboriginal. Four families were drawn from Highglen Primary. One family was drawn from St Andrews, the Catholic primary school. A third of the children at St Andrews were from farming families; none of the children were from Aboriginal or Malay backgrounds.

In addition to the Countrytown families, we also sought to work with two families from each of two very small rural communities. When plans to approach two families through the school in a remote Aboriginal community failed, we used existing personal contacts to approach a family in Blue Creek, a community of five extended families who live close to one of the service towns in the East Kimberley region in the remote North-West corner of Australia. The children from this family, living on the margin of non-Aboriginal Australia, attended a school which received additional funding through the Priority Country Areas Program. The final two families were approached through the primary school at Yabby Creek, a small town of about 120 persons on the edge of the farming land sixty kilometres inland from Countrytown. By virtue of its isolation, the Yabby Creek school qualifies for additional disadvantaged school funding through the Priority Country Areas Program. In view of the small size and homogeneity of the school and community, however, we did not attempt to select the Yabby Creek families according to perceived social class differences in the community.

Across the whole study, then, we worked with six city families whose children were enrolled in Disadvantaged Schools Program schools and six city families whose children were not enrolled in Disadvantaged Schools Program schools. Of the eleven rural families, we worked with three rural families whose children were enrolled in a Disadvantaged Schools Program school, three families whose children were enrolled in a school disadvantaged by isolation, one family whose children were enrolled in a private school with relatively few children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and four families whose children were enrolled in a school not funded by the Disadvantaged Schools Program.

The absence or presence of schools on the list of disadvantaged schools provided the study with a clear first cut on social class differences of school communities. Schools either were or were not eligible for additional funding on the basis of an Australian-wide index of disadvantage. The individual families with which we worked in each school community, however, could not be fitted so neatly to an "upper" or "lower" dichotomy. As we analysed the data on family literacy practices, we wondered whether there were, in fact, any regularities in the patterns of literacy practices we found in the two groups of schools. For some pairs or groups of families, there did seem to be strong sets of similarities; for other pairs and sets of families, there was no obvious

pattern of relationships between school type, family circumstances and literacy practices. The purpose of the remainder of this chapter is to consider the case study evidence of relationships between social class and family literacy practices. For the purpose of this analysis, the data from seven of the twenty-three families in the study will be considered. These families will be considered in two groups: Group 1 comprises the Caravaggio, Scott/Clay/Bailey and Kha Families, Group 2 comprises the Long , Waugh, Kelly and Jackson Families

Group 1: The Caravaggio, Scott/Clay/Bailey and Kha Families

The Caravaggio Family

The Caravaggio family have three children who attend Highglen primary school in Countrytown. In terms of income, education and the social status of their occupations, they appear to be middle class. John Caravaggio, the children's father, is a solicitor. Anne, their mother, is trained as a biochemist but works part-time in her husband's office. Her father is a medical practitioner. Their children attend the higher status government primary school, Highglen, and they live on "Nob's Hill".

The Caravaggios have many of the family literacy practices and patterns of parent involvement in schooling that have been associated with school success. Anne is a keen reader and is closely involved in the children's schooling. For seven years she was treasurer of the Parents and Citizens Association. One morning a week she helps out with mathematics in the class of her youngest child. She also helps out in the school library once a week. She reads aloud to her six-year old son Andrew, who *loves being read to and loves reading books from school.* She is well informed about the children's school activities and closely monitors their homework. She checks Paul's (Year 7) maths homework and takes him to the library to get information for assignments. One of the few reservations she expressed about the school was that Jane's (Year 4) teacher does not set homework. *I don't really like the idea,* she said. *I don't [think] we get an idea about what's going on and what they're doing.*

One of the audio tapes collected by the family gives an idea of Anne and John's involvement in their children's schooling.

ANNE: And what homework have you got this week Paul?
PAUL I've got a car project due in tomorrow I've got ...
JOHN: Oh
ANNE: Car project? What've you got to do for that?
PAUL: I've got time tomorrow
ANNE: What do you have to do in it?
PAUL: Stuff on cars.
ANNE: So what subject is that car project for?
PAUL: Library.

ANNE: Library?

PAUL; Mmmmm

ANNE: So do you need any more information or have you got enough information.....Have you got enough information for it?

PAUL: Yes.

ANNE: Dad might have some glossy magazines or something.

PAUL: He would [laughs].

ANNE: Or are you trying to be lazy and do as little as possible on it?

PAUL: No.

(Something unintelligible)

JOHN: There's a good chapter in that book of inventions. Are you going to do that? Is it a full blown project like others that you have done?

PAUL: Just sort of a half project.

JOHN: Which half have you done? The absent part?

PAUL: The cars on the cover page.

ANNE: And how much time did you have to do it?

PAUL: Two hours.

ANNE: Did you only get it today?

PAUL: No, it's not like a proper project.

ANNE: All right, just a bit of work, motion sheet thing. Mrs Painter doesn't seem to be giving you much homework this term.

PAUL: She's giving us enough.

In this brief extract, Anne checks Paul's homework assignment, finds out the subject for which it has been set, finds out when the project has been set and is due, checks that he has enough information, satisfies herself that it is not an important piece of work, and delivers an oblique judgement on what she takes to be the low demands made on Paul by his teacher. At the same time, John recommends a chapter in a reference book, inquires about the scale of the assignment, and jokingly underlines the importance of making an effort to complete homework when he says *Which half have you done? The absent part?* Paul, who seems much more relaxed about the assignment than his parents, has already classified it as an unimportant time-filling exercise that is *not like a proper project.*

Anne and John have high aspirations for their children. They judge that Paul, the eldest, is *showing enough form to be quite accomplished academically.* Paul knows that in order to compete his education he will have to go to Perth: *I'll be leaving my friends behind but it would be better for my education.* Anne has read aloud to the children in their early years and they have provided the children with a range of print materials. Anne and John promote positive attitudes towards literacy and school success and the home atmosphere is conducive to learning. Anne helps out at the school; and both parents are closely involved in performing academic tasks with the children. The Caravaggios, then, fit the patterns of literacy practices and parental involvement that are thought to be associated with school success.

The Scott/Clay/Bailey Family

The Scott/Clay/Bailey family provides a clear contrast to the Caravaggio family in terms of education, income and the social status of their occupations. Anne Scott, the children's mother, and her husband Neil Bailey both left school at the end of the compulsory years of schooling. Anne works three mornings a week as manager of the school canteen, a job she began as a volunteer. Neil is an outside worker at the state electricity authority. They live in a house they rent from the state housing authority, and the children have both gone to Radcliffe Primary School. Radcliffe has received additional Commonwealth funding for many years through the Disadvantaged Schools Program.

In terms of literacy practices and parental involvement, there is also a contrast with the Caravaggio family. Anne Scott has a substantial involvement with Radcliffe Primary through the canteen and the Parents and Citizens Association, but she is not involved in helping out in the classroom. The family owns some reference books and encyclopaedias, but the most popular books in the household are crossword puzzle books. The children are members of three community libraries, but Millie reported that she had not been to the library for *ages and ages*. Anne takes a close interest in her children's progress, but has not always been able to help her children with their school work. She told a story, for example, of the difficulty Millie had in learning to read, and her own difference of opinion with Millie's Year 1 teacher:

> ANNE: It's a nightmare just getting her to read, to learn to read when she was in Grade 1. Her teacher had a go at me. I was working nights at the time because I was on my own. I was always too tired to sit and read with her. One day the teacher had a go at me. And I just said to her "You know you're the one who gets paid to teach her to read between 9.10 and 3.15 and if you can't, then this is your problem, not mine".

Like the Caravaggios, the Scott/Clay/Baileys provided us with audio tapes of family discussions about homework. In the following example, students were given a photocopied sheet with a list of words in one column and a list of sentences in another column. The sentences had a word missing and students were expected to find a word from the word list to fill the space in the sentence. As Anne and Millie worked through the questions, they consulted a dictionary. Towards the end of the exercise, both Anne and Millie became frustrated with the homework task. Anne asked Millie if the answers she had chosen were correct, Millie said *yes*, and Anne told her that two of the answers were incorrect. This is how the dialogue continued:

ANNE: Well I'll tell you that two of those are wrong.
MILLIE: I thought so.
ANNE: Hey?
MILLIE: I thought so.
ANNE: You thought so. Why do you think so?
MILLIE: [inaudible]
ANNE: Well flattery is untrue compliment ...
MILLIE: Mmm

ANNE: What does insincere mean?

MILLIE: I don't know.

ANNE: You should look up words you don't know in the dictionary not just pretend. Insincere ... [looking up the dictionary] This dictionary is a little bit too adult for you I think. In ... sin ... Insincere. Disingenuous which can mean anything. Let's look up sincere. G H I J K ... sin ... sincere, free from pretence or deceit, genuine. Do you know what genuine is?

MILLIE: Not really.

ANNE: Real.

MILLIE: Yes.

ANNE: So if sincere means real, insincere means not sincere ...

MILLIE: So it's not real.

ANNE: Not real. What does that bring us back to? If it's not real than it's ... could possibly be ... we were talking about something. One of the words there has been talked about as not real.

MILLIE: Not real ... [very long pause]

ANNE: Are you thinking anything or are you just staring?

MILLIE: No I'm reading .... [long pause again]

ANNE: What are you reading?

MILLIE: Those words.

ANNE: Hey?

MILLIE: I want to find out what ..

ANNE: But these are the words you're looking at so.

MILLIE: [long pause]

ANNE: Oh leave it.

In this short extract, Anne is trying to help Millie with her homework, but is having little success. She consults a dictionary in order to help Millie find the meaning of "insincere", but the definition is in terms of "disingenuous", a word neither of them knows. Anne tries an alternative strategy, looking up "sincere", but finds that Millie doesn't know the meaning of "genuine", either. Trying another tack, Anne provides her own definition of sincere as "real", but by the time Millie makes the connection from insincere to sincere, from sincere to genuine, from genuine to real, and from real to not real, she has lost her place on the homework exercise sheet and Anne has exhausted her energy for the task.

The contrast between the Scott/Clay/Bailey family and the Caravaggio family seems to follow the social class lines described in the literature of literacy practices and parental involvement. Despite her involvement with the school canteen and her willingness to help with homework, she is not able to help her children perform academic tasks. The children have access to books and libraries, but the family uses only a narrow range of print materials. Anne hopes that the children will do well at school and that school will provide them with some of the skills they need in life, but she has modest aspirations for Millie's academic success. Millie did not learn to read quickly and is still not a very keen reader. Anne Scott recognises this and agrees with a comment made by one of

Millie's teachers: *Her grade 3 teacher said, 'She's never going to be a student but she certainly won't fail in life', and that's my opinion of it too.*

The Kha Family

The Kha family, a Cambodian family with two children attending the same school as Anne Scott's daughter, provides a even sharper contrast with the Caravaggio family. The Kha family arrived in Australia less than six years ago after spending eight years in a refugee camp in Thailand. Both of their children were born in Thailand. In Cambodia, Mr and Mrs Kha were farmers. In Australia they both work as strawberry pickers in season, but were unemployed when we spoke to them. They live in a home they rent from the state housing authority. Until recently they shared the house with an uncle, aunt and set of cousins. Mr Kha is presently teaching himself to read in English; Mrs Kha can neither read nor speak English. There are very few books of any kind in the house. The only book Bopha (Year 7) owns is an atlas she won as a school prize. Because of the language differences Mr and Mrs Kha are not able to help their children with homework from school, but they sometimes help with homework from the Cambodian school the children attend on Saturdays. Mr and Mrs Kha have some contact with their children's school through events such as assemblies and sports carnivals. They don't visit Bopha's Year 7 class, but they do visit Sambath's Year 2 bilingual class.

Although Mr Kha has high aspirations for his children, he is not able to help them with their school work. In fact, important family transactions requiring contact with non-Cambodian agencies are undertaken by the fourteen-year-old Bopha. She translates for her family in medical emergencies and she acted as the go-between in this study. As the following extract shows, she accepts responsibility deciding what her parents do and do not need to know about the world of school:

INT:	What do you do when you have to bring a note home, to get it signed?
BOPHA:	They sign but fill it all in myself.
INT:	Right so what you'd read it to your Dad and Mum, or you just [
BOPHA:	[I just do it. I just let them sign it.
INT:	Do they often ask you what it's about?
BOPHA;	Yeah. I say it's about camp, medical.
INT:	And then they'll sign it?
BOPHA:	Yes.

Social Class Differences and Literacy Practices in Group 1

Juxtaposed in this way, these three case studies neatly support the quantitative research conclusions about the relationship between social class and family literacy practices. The Caravaggios are tertiary educated, employed and prosperous. Their children attend a school which is not entitled to additional funding through the Disadvantaged Schools Program. The literacy practices of the Caravaggio families closely resemble the kinds of

activities valued by schools. They buy books when they travel to the city or to a larger town on the coast, borrow books from the library, read *The Bulletin* and *The Weekend Australian* and read aloud to their youngest child. They help out at school through the Parents and Citizens Association and Ann is involved in the school's mathematics and library classes, and provide effective academic assistance to their oldest child. The adults in the Scott/Clay/Bailey family work in blue-collar occupations, left school at the end of the compulsory years, live in rented housing provided by the state housing authority, and their children attend a Disadvantaged Schools Program school. The Scott/Clay/Bailey family owns encyclopaedias but makes more use of puzzle and crossword books, they make little use of their libraries, Anne Scott is involved with the school canteen but not the school's academic program. She energetically supervises homework but cannot assist Millie with some academic tasks sent home by the school. The adults in the Kha family are unemployed. The Kha family owns a few books in Cambodian and English and the children have a much stronger grasp of English than either Mr and Mrs Kha. Mr Kha helps his children with Cambodian school homework but not regular school homework. He visits the bilingual class attended by his son, but does not participate in lessons in the class. The older child borrows books from the library for school projects but not for personal reading and the younger child owns only an atlas he won as a school prize.

Considering this group of families together, it is easy to be persuaded that there is a direct relationship between social class location and literacy practices: that society is neatly stratified by social class, and that family literacy practices echo the social class differences. These are, however, just three of the twenty-three case studies collected in this project. Few of the case studies allow for such a neat juxtaposition. As the next section will go on to argue, there are many cases where the relationship between class location and literacy practices is much more ambiguous.

Group 2: The Long, Waugh, Kelly and Jackson Families

Consider the case of the Long family. Mr and Mrs Long are recent immigrants from Yorkshire. Mr Long works as a machinist; Mrs Long works as a part-time word-processor. Neither of the parents was educated beyond the compulsory years. Their two children attend Redlands, a school supported through the Disadvantaged Schools Program. In terms of income, occupation and education, the Long family sounds working class. The family's literacy practices and the parents' involvement in their children's schooling, however, seem very similar to the middle-class Caravaggios.

Mr and Mrs Long both spend time in the school. Mr Long is treasurer of the Parents and Citizen's Association and canteen committee, and he attends school excursions and sporting events. The children have many books and magazines, they read widely, and they talk to their parents about their reading. The family plays quiz games together, and the home atmosphere is conducive to learning. Homework is very important to the Long children, and their parents often help. Describing an assignment on Marie Curie, Andrew talked about the help his mother gave him:

> "That's where my mum helped me like, she said to put it in areas like this. Put like the family history one page ... and set it out like that ... I learn how to set it out better and a lot of information like that ... So I found out [from Mum] how to look through books to find more information instead of just looking through it and picking out little things, I should concentrate on what I'm doing."

Mr and Mrs Long have a good understanding of their children's academic progress. They know that Andrew (Year 7) is very successful at school and that Sally (Year 3) is working below the average level for her Year. Concerned about Sally's progress, Mrs Long and Sally's teacher are working hard to improve Sally's reading. They have been using a paired reading strategy to motivate her. One bed-time, for example, Mrs Long was reading to Sally from *Beware of Boys*. She discusses the pictures with Sally, Sally takes over the reading at some points, and Mrs Long prompts where necessary. Sally asks the meaning of unknown words:

MRS L: One barrel of bricks and one trowel. Method. First catch your boy.

SALLY: What's a trowel?

MRS L: A trowel. That's ... you put plaster on the wall with it. First catch your boy ...

When Mrs Long has finished reading Sally says, *Now it's my turn* and reads *Matilda and the Dragon* with encouragement from her mother. Errors are not corrected, there is a discussion of the pictures and of new vocabulary, and when Mrs Long insists that story time is over she finishes of with a kiss and a hug.

The Waugh Family

Unlike the Long family, the Waugh family is well established in Australia. Brian Waugh inherited the family farm when his father passed away, and has since bought more land. Altogether, the Waughs now own 7,000 acres. *You've got to have at least 2,000 acres to make a success of it,* Amanda said, *so with that we'll be able to say at least to the boys well, you know, 'The choice is yours if you want to come on the farm'.* Amanda's schooling ended at Year 10, and Brian spent two years beyond Year 10 at an agricultural school before returning to the family farm. The Waugh's regular reading includes a farming weekly circulated by Elders, *The Women's Weekly* and *Women's Day.* They help out at the Yabby Creek school working bees and attend school sports days and parents evenings. Like most of the parents in our case studies, they are involved with their children's homework. Brian gave examples of helping Michael (13) with maths homework, where *He was just guessing and then I put him on the right track and he got it just like that,* and helping Adrian (12) with a project on farming. The audio tapes provided by the family include an example of Amanda helping Christopher (7) with his reading:

CHRIS.: A long, long time ...

AMANDA: ago

CHRIS.: ago ... A little man and a little woman lived in a house. In the house there was a shop where ... man ...[

AMANDA: A little old man

CHRIS.: ... made (interruption) shoes ... [

AMANDA: Read that

CHRIS.: The little old woman helped him. They were happy when they met made many shoes. One night the little old man said ... to the little woman no ...

AMANDA: m-o-n-e (sounding out letters)

CHRIS.: money we must have money to get ... (inaudible)

AMANDA: Good boy

CHRIS.: the shoes. We can cannot

AMANDA: C-a-n-t (sounding out letters)

CHRIS.: can't (inaudible) ...

AMANDA: Sit up, keep going. Only a couple more pages to go.

CHRIS.: Come on, you got to be joking. (inaudible).

AMANDA: Come on.

CHRIS.: The little old woman do not//

AMANDA: Didn't

CHRIS.: Didn't like to see the ... old man so unhappy ... I think about now she said we can talk about ... m-m in the morning.

AMANDA: money

CHRIS.: Money

AMANDA: We can talk about the money or the leather in the morning.

CHRIS.: ... or the leather in the morning. So the little old man and the little old woman went to bed ... In the m-o-r-n morning the sh shoemaker came ... n no

AMANDA: new

CHRIS.: New p-a, p-a pairs of shoes ...

AMANDA: how[

CHRIS.: [How can ... (interruption) The little old woman p-a ... (interruption)

AMANDA: Come on, keep going please. Read that bit again there.

CHRIS.: How can this be ... I had r-e ... re-e ... were (inaudible) ... to do//

AMANDA: Today

This piece of transcript shows that Amanda Waugh is anxious to help Christopher with his reading. The assistance she offers, however, focuses on helping him to sound out letters and achieve literal correctness in his reading. As they labour through the task, Amanda frames the reading homework as something that must be completed, rather than an enjoyable and meaningful activity.

Brian and Amanda Waugh's aspirations are for their children are not narrowly framed in terms of success at school. *We don't want them to leave school,* Amanda said. *I mean we wouldn't stop them but we'd prefer them to do something, have something else, some other outlet. So if they become a mechanic or electrician, anything like that so if it's quiet on the farm they can go out and work at their trade.* Then, at least,

they've got something to fall back on. Whether or not the children will be successful at school, they think, is a matter of attitude:

> AMANDA: ... it's attitudes really, isn't it. If they've got a down and out "Oh I don't give a damn" attitude, well then they won't get anywhere. But if they're keen to go along and do their best and learn the best way they can, they'll always plod along and get there.

The Kelly Family

The Kelly family is much less prosperous than the Waugh family. Kevin and Bridgit Kelly rent an old house near the centre of Countrytown. The children attend Countrytown, the Disadvantaged Schools Program school. Kevin Kelly left school at fourteen and presently works as a contract gardener. Bridgit was trained as a nurse in the hospital training era and is presently completing a TAFE conversion course. She currently works in a refuge for the homeless. Bridgit does not read fiction, but reads books in relation to her nursing studies, he reads the children's text books and she reads to the children. Kevin is described by his wife as *semi-literate*. Notwithstanding his limited reading skill, he has drawn on a collection of Bill Mollison books to develop his interest in permaculture. All three of the children are interested in reading. Patrick (aged 11) reads in bed at night, Liam reads school books with his mother and *will get out books ... from the bookshelf.* Sinead (aged 4) *thinks she can read,* said Amanda. *She reads in bed or if I've gone to bed really early and she wants to give me a cuddle, she'll get a book and she'll read one of her little books while I'm reading my book.* Kevin and Bridgit do not want to impose expectations of educational success on their children. As Bridgit said, *Its up to you, if you want it.* It does not seem likely that Patrick will decide that school will be useful to him. He is one of only two children in his class who had no work on display, and he failed to finish most of the work set during the day we visited his classroom. Asked about what he thought about this school day, Patrick volunteered that it was *a bit better than usual,* because he *didn't get into trouble much.* In contrast with his diffidence about school activities, Patrick is a keen musician who is learning the violin, trombone and keyboard. Neither Kevin nor Bridgit is closely involved in the children's school. The teachers, she thinks, consider her a little eccentric. Nor do they aspire for material success for their children. As Kevin said, *I'd rather Patrick ended up a being a surfer and spending his life on the beach than suiciding because he can't make some goal we've set for him.*"

The Jackson Family

The Jacksons are a Malay family from Cocos Island. As children, Susan and Azmi Jackson attended school on Cocos Island where they learned English. They speak English well, and use Malay at home. They are both employed at the meatworks, Azmi as a slaughterman and Susan as a cleaner. Their children attend Highglen, the higher status of the two government primary schools in Countrytown. Susan sometimes helps the children with their homework, *If I can help, but my maths doesn't go that high.* Azmi reads *The West Australian* when he is not working (during the off season at the meatworks) and Susan sometimes buys *The Women's Weekly.* The three older boys

spend a portion of their out-of-school time at Malay school or at the mosque. much of Dawi (aged 11), for example, learns to read the Qur'an for about two hours after school on weekdays. On Saturday and Sunday he attends Malay school, which is located behind the mosque, to learn about Islam. He learns to read the Qur'an in Arabic, which he understands *a little bit*. Azmi Jackson is very concerned about his son's future employment. *I'm always talking to my children,* he said, *If you have no education you will be the same like your dad. ... I will always talk to my oldest son, push him to study very hard so he can get a job when he leaves school.*

Social Class Differences and Literacy Practices in Group 2

Considered together, this second group of four families paints a much more complex picture of the relationship between social class and literacy practices. The Long family would be considered working class in terms of parents' education, income, or occupation. They live in a neighbourhood where many of the houses are rented from the state housing authority, and their children attend a Disadvantaged Schools program school. Their family literacy practices, however, seem very similar to those of the Caravaggios. They provide a home environment conducive to learning, they participate in shared reading activities and read aloud to their younger child, they provide academic assistance for their children, and they are involved in the academic life of the school. Like the Caravaggios, they are well informed about their children's school performance and they regard school success as important for their children. When they help their children with school work, they do so in a way that echoes school attitudes and practices. Their daughter is a weak reader, but rather than correcting their daughter's reading syllable by syllable, Mrs Long uses a shared reading strategy and focuses first on making meaning from the text.

The Waugh family, on the other hand, combine significant financial resources with literacy practices more reminiscent of the Scott/Clay/Bailey family. Their home provides a relatively narrow range of print materials, they are not involved in the school's academic program, and when Amanda Waugh listened to Christopher read aloud her efforts to assist him led to a focus on sounding out words and the loss of meaning. The Waugh family would like their children to do well at school if that is what the children choose, but would be equally happy if the boys learned a trade that would *give them something to fall back on* if farm incomes were to drop.

In contrast with the three families described in Group 1 - Caravaggio, Scott/Clay/Bailey and Kha - the Long and Waugh families do not provide a neat fit with the family practices predicted by the international literature on family literacy practices. Classified according to literacy practices, the Longs seem more like the Caravaggios and the Waughs seem more like the Scott/Clay/Bailey family.

The Kelly family seems similar in some ways to the Scott/Clay/Bailey family They are not well off financially, the parents have relatively narrow reading habits and one of the adults in each family has quite limited literacy skills. They do, however, make active use of written texts that they need to read, such as Bridgit's nursing texts and Kevin's

permaculture books. Unlike any of the families so far described, the Kellys are not involved with the school. Bridgit acknowledged their difference when she told us that she thought the teachers regarded her as eccentric. Also unlike most of the other families involved in this study, the Kellys have a child who is plainly in conflict with the school. Nor does the family take the conventional attitude to school success. When their children want to participate in school-like activities - such as Sinead's parallel reading activity - Bridgit joins in, but they seem to attach no more value to literacy activities than to Patrick's musical learning. They are open to the possibility that their children pursue their interests through further education, but do not believe in applying any pressure towards their children's school success.

The Kelly family fail to fit a structure which pairs class and literacy practices because they choose to stand outside the mainstream. The Jackson family stands outside the mainstream for different reasons. In their case, issues of language, culture and religion separate them from mainstream life in Countrytown. They are as interested as any of the other families in school success as a means social mobility, but much of the boys' out of school time is taken up with literacy practices associated with Islam. These practices involve learning to read the sacred text in Arabic, a language the boys do not speak. The text is sometimes translated into Malay, a language they speak but do not read. This form of reading has great religious value to the family and the Malay community in Countrytown, but it operationalises a different definition of reading than school literacy. In the school, reading is taken to be about making meaning through literal understanding of the text. The work of the Malay school, it seems, stands entirely outside the school's understanding of its work, and the richness of the boys' knowledge of the Qur'an, of Arabic and of Malay goes unremarked.

Conclusions

With this sort of mixed evidence from the case study families, what conclusions can be drawn about home literacy practices and social class? Looked at through the lens of social class differences, the evidence from the first group of families seems to suggest an association between social class differences and family literacy practices. On a continuum from the Kha family through the Scott/Clay/Baileys to the Caravaggios, family literacy practices seem increasingly supportive of the kinds of activities the children's schools define as literate. The Khas are keen for their children to do well at school, but have language and cultural resources that are different from those assumed in mainstream schools. They are not able to provide assistance with their children's homework in English or to provide them with books in English. If it were not for Bopha Kha's Year 2 bilingual English/Khmer class, there would be even fewer points of contact between the parents' language and culture and that of the school. The Scott/Clay/Baileys provide a family environment with more English books and membership of local libraries, but puzzle and crossword books are the most popular written texts in the household. Anne Scott helps her children complete their homework, but the case study material suggests that her efforts neither teach Millie how to do a task nor motivate her to complete it on her own. When the Caravaggios undertake what is

ostensibly the same practice, helping with homework, they scaffold the task in a way which helps Paul with the work and they motivate him to complete the work on his own.

This regular relationship between rising social class and increasingly school-like literacy practices, however, is not sustained in the second group of families. For some, such as the Longs and the Waughs, there is an inversion between the social class location and the expected literacy practices; for others such as the Kellys and the Jacksons, social class location seems unrelated to their literacy practices and the meaning they ascribe to the practices. The Kelly family choose to stand outside of conventional beliefs about the value of school, and the Jacksons have well developed literacy practices associated with Islam which bear little relationship to the understanding of literacy which is most common in the schools.

In framing this study, we began with an either/or indicator of social class: whether or not children were enrolled in Commonwealth disadvantaged program schools. This, it must be admitted, is a crude and static operational definition of social class which implies that the mean on a set of social indicators adequately summarises all of the variation within a school community. Such means may be adequate for statistical purposes, such as justifying the allocation of disadvantaged schools money, but it overestimates the impact of social structures in individuals' behaviour and underestimates the impact of their personal agency. The real world of class relations, as Connell (1993) has argued, is not a static set of social structures:

> The real world of class relations ... is a world where some kinds of possibilities are constantly being opened up, others closed down; where some kinds of practice lead into unexpected traps, and others to unexpected transformation; in sum, where structural mutation is the rule rather than the exception (Connell, 1983, p. 157).

In this study, we think that there are some working class families where possibilities are being opened up. The Long family, for example, seems to be in a state of transformation. They are closely involved with their children's school work and are pleased with their progress. After some intervention from the school and her parents, Sally is now improving. Andrew is *top at the moment and he's head boy.* Next year he has the choice of scholarships at three selective high schools. In a somewhat different way, the Kha family was not able to intervene to help their children with their academic work, but Mr Kha's insistence that his children work hard and do well at school may be just as powerful a force. As he said when we first interviewed him and reiterated at later interviews, he often says to his children *you have to go to school, working hard at school, don't be lazy ... don't like father go to work at the farm.* The Kha family shares this sentiment with the Longs, with Azmi Jackson who said *If you have no education you will be like your dad ... I will always talk to my son, push him to study very hard,* and with the middle class Caravaggios who expect that Paul will be *quite accomplished academically.*

There are also some families where possibilities are being closed down. The Kelly family values their children's independence over conformity to the school's norms, but

the family's scepticism about the value of schooling seems to be echoed in Patrick's marginalisation within his Year 6 class. Similarly, the Scott/Clay/Bailey family's acceptance that Millie is *never going to be a student* and the Waugh family's judgement that the value of education is that it *provides something to fall back* both serve to limit the prospect that their children's schooling is going to play a part in social mobility.

Following Connell's line, that structural mutation is the rule rather than the exception in class relations, leads to a different formulation of the relationship between social class and literacy practices. Instead of the static view of the Caravaggios firmly located at one end of the class structure and the Kha family stuck at the other end without language, cultural or financial resources to assist their children, a more open and ambiguous set of relationships emerges. The literacy practices of some middle class parents are different from some working class families. They tend to have more books and magazines, and more involvement with their children's academic work. When they help with homework they often do the same kind of work as teachers do. But the mutation of the class structure and the transformation of individual families begins to occur when families such as the Longs open up the possibilities, become involved in the academic program of the school, provide the kind of assistance with homework that teachers believe to be useful, and set or share their children's high aspirations. In other cases, such as the Kha and Jackson families, where the literacy practices may be tangential to those of the school for cultural reasons, the active belief in the possibility of growth and change may be as important as any particular set of school-like literacy practices.

We understand the evidence of this study to confirm that some of the literacy practices associated in the international research literature with middle class families are present in some of our middle class families, and that these practices are likely to provide a support for their children's school learning. We also understand the study to confirm that some of these practices are either absent from some of our working class families or conducted in such a way as to have a different meaning. We think, however, that the personal agency of individual families can be as important as their location on a static social class structure: creating middle class practices in a working class family, creating working class practices in a middle class family, or supporting ambition for social mobility through education in the absence middle class literacy practices.

To draw these conclusions, however, requires movement from the particulars of individual families to the generalities of social class relations. As we move from the particulars of the twenty-three families in our study and the seven families that have been used to build the argument in this chapter, to the macro-sociological world of social class categorisation, an intellectual sleight of hand takes place. We stop talking about the Longs or Caravaggios, where the reader can return to the specifics of the evidence to test our assertions, and start talking about middle class and working class practices, about static and mobile models of social class. As Dorothy Smith (1989, 1990) has pointed out, such conclusions can only be achieved by objectifying the experience of individual subjects:

> Social scientific strategies for exploring macro-social relations depend on conceptual practices that construct a textual version of society and social relations

> excluding the presence of subjects (Smith 1989), hence displacing the connection between the explored and analysed relations and the actualities of people's lives (1990, p. 10).

Despite the abstract language, this is not an abstract point. Once created, sociological categories and conclusions have a life of their own in the world. Teachers and principals talk about middle class parents or working class parents or non-English speaking background parents or Aboriginal parents as if the sociological label defines a set of uniform behaviour, rather than abbreviating some set of particular data.

We have concluded family literacy practices are part of a pattern of class relations which opens up or closes down educational possibilities for individual families. School success is harder to achieve for children in families disadvantaged by poverty, with literacy practices which are different from those valued at school, or with language and cultural backgrounds different from their teachers. But it is not sufficient to see these differences as part of a monolithic class-based deficit for all working class children and class-based advantage for all middle class children. Nor is it sufficient for teachers and policy makers to act on the assumption of such monolithic and static generalisations. All of our schools are heterogeneous to some extent, catering for children from families with a range of aspirations and family literacy practices. For teachers, the practical question is not are more of these children middle class or working class, but what can we do to open up the possibilities for these particular children?

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CHAPTER 6
HOME AND SCHOOL LITERACY PRACTICES

Mary Rohl

Introduction

In her book *Ways with Words* Shirley Brice Heath (1983) suggests that for the children of Tracton and Roadville there was a mismatch between the literacy practices of the home and those of the school: "Neither community's ways with the written word prepares it for the school's ways." The present study enables us to compare the literacy practices of both the home and the school in a context different to that investigated by Brice Heath.

The overwhelming impression from the data is the apparent sameness of literacy experiences for all children in school compared to the diversity of the home literacy environments. This is not to say that all classrooms were exactly the same, but the differences between them may be explained in terms of age-appropriate instruction, teacher personality and beliefs about literacy. In Western Australia the *English Language Syllabus* for Years K-7 and other curriculum documents and materials, in particular the *First Steps* program, have had a great effect upon the content of language and literacy instruction and the strategies used by teachers throughout the state.

On the other hand the literacy practices of the home reflect the language and literacy backgrounds and culture of individual families. It became apparent that there is a wealth of cultural diversity amongst Western Australian families and that some home environments complement those of the school to greater degree than others. The data suggest that there are several dimensions along which literacy practices may vary in home and school.

The school literacy environment

As the researchers entered the classrooms in the study their eyes were bombarded by print. The classroom walls were used by teachers for various purposes. In many classrooms this environmental print was used to control behaviour, with the class rules prominently displayed, along with penalties for breaking them:

Class rules:

Hands and feet to yourself
Respect other people's property
Listen when the teacher speaks

Consequences:

Name on board no penalty
Tick fifteen lines
2 Ticks Thirty lines
3 Ticks sent to administration
Severe clause: A student is sent straight to administration for serious misbehaviour

In the classroom where these rules were displayed, print was used in order to inform children of the exact type of physical behaviour expected and exactly how the penalties were graded. Justice could be meted out without discussion. The teacher did, however, have the right to invoke the most severe penalty at his discretion.

Print was also used to give information which varied with the age of the children. In a pre-primary room there was information about birthdays and tying shoelaces. In the Grade 1 classrooms the focus on literacy development was much more in evidence with a wealth of information such as how to form the letters of the alphabet, common letter sequences, colour words and sentence beginnings. This type of information was given in English and also in Khmer for those children taking part in the Cambodian bilingual program. In a Year 7 classroom students were given information on how to learn spellings, about the Quarantine Service and how to reason: *Understand the problem, Develop a plan, Carry out the plan, Look back.*

In many classrooms print was used to encourage children, with charts of progress and displays of children's work. It was also used for classroom organisation, with lists of classroom helpers and lists of the days' tasks written on the blackboard:

Finish descriptive words Out of the zoo

- *When you finish your Reading, show me and you'll receive $1.00*
- *Complete your adjectives poster and each member in your group (who helped) will receive $1.00*
- *When you've finished the above, you may take one of the booklets below and do some of the activities in it*

In this particular classroom, print was used to inform children of extrinsic rewards in the form of token money for completion of literacy tasks. The classrooms of several

children in the study used such token economies for both task completion and for "good" behaviour.

Print was also used to construct literacy practices themselves. For example these extracts from a chart entitled *Am I becoming a good speller?* inculcate desired habits and attitudes towards spelling: *I care about spelling; I write often; I proofread my writing; I read every day.* In another classroom there was a poster called *Homework Rules* which exhorted children amongst other things to:

> *Plan a daily homework time*
> *Choose a quiet study*
> *Read and follow all directions*
> *Ask for help if you need to but do the work yourself*
> *Keep your homework in a special place*
> *Return your homework on time*

Children were here being given advice on planning for homework, the physical environment for it and how to carry it out. They were also, by implication being informed of the high value placed on homework: it is to be kept in *a special place* and done *neatly and carefully*, as well as to be given in *on time*.

In most classrooms there was a large supply of books of various genres which, apart from the Cambodian classroom in Radcliffe and Jaji School in Blue Creek, seemed to be exclusively in English. The Cambodian classroom had Australian books in which the text had been covered and Khmer script superimposed by the aide and the Cambodian teacher. Elsewhere, seemed to be some acknowledgment of Aboriginal culture in a few classroom literacy materials: Michelle Manders, an Aboriginal girl at in Year 3 at Highglen Primary School, was observed reading two traditional Aboriginal picture books written in English.

It seems that, in terms of access to numbers of books and in the amount of environmental print available to children, the literacy environments of the schools were rich. All schools also owned computers and other audio-visual resources. All schools had libraries to which children had easy access. But there were few books in them which reflected the cultural diversity of the children's backgrounds: Radcliffe, the school containing the bilingual class had no library books in Khmer and Windsor Park, with 40% of the school population from non-English speaking backgrounds, had 10 library books in languages other than English out of a total of over 6,000. The numbers of books which reflected Aboriginal culture in all the school libraries was not recorded. Therefore, in spite of the cultural diversity of the school populations there was little in these kinds of provision to meet the potential linguistic contributions of many of the children.

The home literacy environment

The homes of the families varied greatly in the amount of print available to children, but none had anything approaching the amount of environmental print which was a feature of classroom walls. One of the few homes in which there was written text on the wall was that of the George family from Countrytown where religious texts in Arabic were displayed. The number of literacy resources in homes varied from no books, apart from an atlas that a child had won, to large libraries which included fiction and non-fiction texts, such as those of the Smith family of Windsor Park who estimated that their children owned about 200 books each. A surprising number of families, regardless of class, location or culture, owned encyclopaedias. The Kuhns from Radcliffe, the Wongs from Windsor Park and the Georges from Countrytown had all bought encyclopedias to help their children with their homework. For some parents the buying of the encyclopaedias was made easy as the following extract from an interview with the Baumans of Redlands illustrates:

MRS B:	We've got *Australian and New Zealand* encyclopaedias, we've got *Animal Life* and *How it Works...*
MR B:	They're very good, very good indeed and rather than have to outlay, you know, thousands of dollars they only cost you a few dollars a week and you get each episode.
MRS B:	There's about six volumes.
MR B:	And they're absolutely jammed packed full of information.
MRS B:	Plus they have an atlas at the back with all the countries.
INT:	Where do you buy them from?
MRS B:	Just down at the newsagents. When I do my Lotto.

The texts owned by adults in the study varied with the culture and values of the families. Most families read the newspapers at some point in the week, but not many took the paper each day. Those families who were religious had religious texts available, such as the Bible, *The Book of Mormon*, the Qur'an and the teachings of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The texts owned by many of the families were in English, although the Kuhns had a Khmer translation of the Bible and other writings in that language and the Georges had the Qur'an in Arabic. Some of the families took women's magazines such as *Women's Weekly*, whilst others took more serious journals such as the *Bulletin*. The Carroll family of Radcliffe took many journals, including Church magazines and the publications of their network sales business, one of which was entitled *The Instant Millionaire.*

The books in the home came from a wide variety of sources. Most families were members of the local library and borrowed from there. Usually it was the mother who took the children to the library. For those families whose thirst for books could not be satisfied by the local library, book exchanges and swap meets were good sources of materials. The Caravaggio family from Countrytown had been to the *Save the Children Fund Book Sale* in the holidays and also bought from bookshops while visiting the city since *the choice in the newsagency here is a bit limited.* Similarly the Johnsons of Yabby Creek had recently been to Perth to buy books. The Ashton Scholastic

children's book club, which was run by schools in the city and in the country, was also a source of books for many families in the study and the Long children had bought books from a book sale organised by the school. The Caravaggios also belonged to an adult mail order book club.

In contrast to the schools, which all appeared to have adequate literacy resources, the literacy environments of the children's homes varied enormously, although all had access to school and public libraries.

Purposes for reading: the school context

The environmental print in schools was used for a variety of purposes. In the early years of school there was an emphasis on learning to read. Julian Barnes in the Pre-primary centre at Windsor Park had completed a concepts of print test and was engaged in various reading and reading-related activities, including a *quiet reading time*, even though he said *No I can't read, but I know pictures*. In this way he was being constructed as a reader by engaging in reading-like behaviours. The Year 1 children at Radcliffe read in Khmer from a Big Book and both the Year 1 and 2 children constructed a Christmas alphabet in English from a book that they had been reading. Even at these early stages of reading there was not only an emphasis on the decoding of print, but also on understanding what had been read. As Joshua Kuhn's teacher read a story she asked the children to predict what *might be in the box* and to name animals which appeared in the book.

The older children were taught more sophisticated strategies for using and gaining meaning from print. Kate Bauman and Sally Long in Year 3 at Redlands learnt how to construct a literary socio-gram (diagrammatic representation of the relationships between the main characters in a book) to aid their understanding of the story of Pinocchio. Kate's sister Kirsty in Year 6 was involved in a *Reciprocal Reading* lesson in which the children had to *predict, question, clarify and summarise* the text they were reading in order to gain meaning.

In addition to learning to read, there was also an emphasis on reading to learn in the classrooms. Andrew Smith and John Ling's Year 2 class at Windsor Park had been reading books about dinosaurs and had a discussion about what they'd learnt. The teacher told them to *listen because it might be something you don't know. And I'm amazed at all those people here that have read about dinosaurs and they might know some things that you don't know.* Here the children were being asked to discuss and share the knowledge that they had gained from reading a variety of texts. The Year 6 class at the same school used a worksheet and their dictionaries to help them learn about AIDS.

There was some attempt by the schools to encourage individual reading for pleasure and relaxation. Silent reading sessions were observed in several classrooms. In the Year 7 class at Yabby Creek, the children had individual 'conferences' or discussions with their teacher about the books that they had been reading. In the Year 7 class at

Windsor Park there was a strong emphasis on literature and the themes from literature were used to motivate learning in other areas. Morris Gleitzman's *Stickybeak* was used as the catalyst for a health education lesson on team membership. The children in this class were encouraged to write comments in a "visitor's book" about the books they had read. There was some degree of censorship by the teacher of this class who commented that she would not provide *Sweet Valley High* books, although the children could bring them to school if they wished. By choosing books for study by the class which were different from those read by many of the children at home and by not encouraging the reading of some 'popular' books this teacher showed the children that she valued some books over others. In her classroom, the children were expected to analyse the characters in books, with the responses of all children being accepted. In order to make connections and to draw attention to the way in which a writer may manipulate the feelings of the reader, the teacher questioned the children:

> "Can anyone pinpoint for me, it was in a very small part of the book, where we almost felt sorry for Darren Pick. He'd been an absolute nerd up to that stage. Dork number one. But there was a moment in that book where we almost felt sorry for him and where we felt that he was insecure. Anybody remember?"

In many other classrooms fiction was read to children and discussed. There were often tasks to be performed following the reading, such as the literary socio-gram of *Pinocchio* in Year 3 at Redlands and a class discussion of similes following a tape-recorded reading in Year 6 at Windsor Park. In this Year 6 class, the children were also required to examine the illustrations and text of *Grandad's Gifts* by Paul Jennings in order to establish if the mood in one matched the other. In such sessions it seemed that the purpose of reading was not only for enjoyment but also to analyse the ways in which fiction is constructed.

A feature of some classrooms was worksheets and workbooks, which children were required to read and then fill in the blank spaces. Their frequency of use varied, with some classrooms in which they were not in evidence and others in which their use was widespread. In the Year 6/7 classroom of Thy Kuhn and Bopha Kha of Radcliffe, two worksheets were given out in one lesson and the class apparently were so used to completing them that the teacher felt that no explanation of what was to be done was necessary. For Thy and Bopha, the purpose of the worksheets was not clear, and they were not able to complete them in any meaningful way. Bopha retired from the activity and Thy, after displaying frustration, rushed out of the classroom at the end of the lesson to play basketball. In this exercise the purpose seemed to be to achieve 'correct' form as much as content, so that Thy who had the correct meaning for one response was told that he was *incorrect* as his answer was given in *two sentences, not one.*

The teachers' purposes for using worksheets and books seemed to vary. The most popular of the workbooks seemed to be the Education Department's *Spellit, Patterns* and *My Word* books, which deal with spelling and word study. Whilst these seemed sometimes to be used for the purpose of social control by keeping children busy and quiet, the *My Word* book was used by a Year 7 teacher at Redlands as the catalyst for a

discussion of word meanings, geography and world affairs, as well as for dictionary skills.

Through the ways in which they used reading, teachers were constructing the children as readers in various ways. In their lesson Thy Kuhn and Bopha Kha were learning that the purpose of reading was to gain an answer which was correct in form as well as in content. Their younger brothers in the bilingual class were learning the roles of participants in group reading sessions in two languages and their purpose for reading was to analyse the internal structure of words as well as to gain information from the text. Andrew Smith and John Ling in Year 2 at Windsor Park were learning that a purpose for reading could be to share information with others, as were the Year 7 children at Redlands. There were also observations in which children were shown the enjoyment which can come from personal response to literature that can provide the incentive for fur her individual reading. In some instances children were being constructed as text analysts for whom one of the purposes for reading was to examine the characters in books, the craft of the author in creating them and how the author could manipulate the feelings of readers, as in the Year 7 class at Windsor Park. The examination of text and illustrations by the Year 6 children at Windsor Park and the literary socio-gram constructed by the Year 3 children at Redlands also involved the children reading to analyse text. Whilst the children in different classes and at different times were learning different purposes for reading, all were learning that reading can, to a greater or lesser extent, be used as the springboard for discussion with others.

Purposes for reading: the home context

The purposes for reading in the home varied with individual families. In many families the members read for personal pleasure and it usually was the mother who was the role model for this type of reading. Mrs Bauman in Redlands read *Mills and Boon* whilst waiting for the washing machine to finish and her daughter Cara would also be reading when she was supposed to be doing homework:

> You often catch Cara out when she's supposed to be doing her homework and you sneak up there and open her door and off under her legs goes the book because she's supposed to be doing her homework, because she's probably like me, you get interested in a story and all of a sudden you get called to do something else ..

In such instances there was often little discussion of the books as they were read quickly so that the reader could move on to the next in the series. Many of the books which were read by children in school for silent reading sessions and out of school for leisure reading were of the popular easy to read variety such as *The Babysitters Club, Saddle Club, Sweet Valley High*. Authors who were very popular as they had storylines which were highly motivating to children were Paul Jennings, Roald Dahl, Judy Blume and Beverley Cleary.

Another important purpose for reading in the home by adults was to find out work-related information. It was usually the fathers who undertook this kind of reading,

although there were exceptions, such as Mrs Jackson of Countrytown who used to read the job section of the newspaper until she found a position, and where mothers were engaged in studies for qualifications. Mr Caravaggio in Countrytown also read the newspaper, but a different section and for a different work-related purpose: *As a probate lawyer you've always got to read the death notices. Just in case somebody's died and there's a will that you might, a name you might recognise. So that's a daily ritual.* Similarly, Mr Waugh read the farming paper *Elders: I usually go through that like the* Bible, *don't I?....Anything that yields a bit better or more protein in it makes an extra dollar. So that's mainly what I read.*

In most of the families the children had been read to from an early age, although this was not seen as particularly important by the Kuhn family of Radcliffe:

CHANTHAN:	Sometimes they read to the children but children like to play not listen (laughs)...sometime they like to read to (inaudible) only ..they like to play most ..
INT:	Do the little children have books?
CHANTHAN:	They read their brother books, brother, sister books...they haven't got the book by themselves...
INT:	And are the little ones ever allowed to write?
CHANTHAN:	He draw on the walls sometimes (loud laughter) draw on the wall only

The book reading sessions for some of the children were very informal: Karen Binayi of Blue Creek looked at a book with 4-year-old Kerston when she was visiting the researcher's office. For others the bed-time story was a nightly ritual. When Mrs Long read *Beware of Boys* to Sally at bed-time, Sally joined in and the ritual was finished with a kiss. The purposes of many of these sessions seemed to be to familiarise children with the conventions of literacy in a supportive, enjoyable environment.

Some of the families in the study spent a significant part of their time in religious practices which entailed reading, the purpose of which appeared to be for personal enlightenment. These practices were sometimes similar to the reading practices of school. The Kuhn and Carroll families of Radcliffe both spent time in reading and interpreting religious tracts. The Carroll family read and interpreted the *Book of Mormon* daily, combining reading aloud with discussion. Em Kuhn explained her family's practices:

EM:	Yes. Now we still read 10 chapters each like 10 chapters like my dad Thy and me and my dad Thy and me and then we finish (inaudible) and then we stop and we remember what the chapter is and then we continue it.
INT:	You talk about it before you continue it?
EM:	We pray first.....

In these two families the religious practices of the home appear to be fairly similar to those of the school with their emphasis on the sharing of reading and related discussion which entailed some textual analysis. For the George family of Countrytown, the

religious readings were from the Qur'an, and not in English, nor in their mother tongue Malay, but in Arabic. Whilst it seemed desirable to be able to understand the meaning, it did not seem to be of paramount importance: *If you know about the meaning just a little bit, that's alright for us you see.* Mr George added that there were books available to explain the meaning. Nevertheless, the purpose of this reading again seemed to be for spiritual well-being: *If I read the Qur'an, myself and Allah will be close.* For the children of this family and the Jacksons who also read the Qur'an, the literacy practices seem different from those of the school, where correct oral reading seemed to play a smaller part and where children were encouraged to gain their own meaning from text through discussion.

An important function of English literacy for the George family was reading food labels to find out the ingredients, since their religious dietary practices forbade them to eat certain animal products. Whilst they could decode the word *emulsifier*, they did not comprehend what it was and asked the researcher for information about its source. Other parents also used literacy to help them in their everyday life; Mr Long read recipe books to direct his cooking, whilst his wife read knitting patterns.

Another recurrent and common purpose for reading at home was connected with games that parents played with children or that the children played with each other. Such activities echoed some of the literary activities in school. In the case of games such as *Monopoly*, which was played by several families, including the Baumans and Longs of Redlands, the purpose of reading was to find out the instructions for proceeding through the game. Several families were also interested in quizzes, in which the questions and answers had to be read. The Longs seemed to play the game not just as a family pastime, but more for the purpose of adding to their store of knowledge. The following conversation took place while the family were working through a quiz and the question read out was: *What was the surname of the composer whose first names were Johann Sebastian?*

MRS L:	Bach. I put Strauss.
MR L:	I thought it were Strauss. Johann Sebastian Bach? Are you sure?
MRS L:	Well it's got Bach here.
MR L:	Johann Sebastian Str... I thought it were Strauss (4 secs). All right you can't go against book.
MRS L:	I thought it were Bach, I mean I thought it were Strauss. I put Strauss...
MRS L:	(after the next question has been asked). I can't get over that Strauss.

For this family, the source of knowledge was the book and previous thoughts were discarded, even if this was difficult. For Andrew Long, this activity was very similar to his lesson using the *My Word* book in which new knowledge was constructed through discussion and reference to the dictionary.

A few children used reading to gain knowledge by themselves. Jake Carroll of Radcliffe was often learning something from a book, which at the time of the study was

Italian, and Andrew Long had taught himself to use the new computer by following a tutoring program. Nevertheless, most of the reading done for learning in the home by children was associated with homework assignments. This will be discussed in a later section.

Whilst some of the purposes for reading in the home were similar to those of the school there were some differences in how these purposes were translated into practice. Whilst reading for enjoyment was valued at home and at school, there seemed to be much less discussion of this reading in the home. When asked to record family literacy practices, one upper primary respondent said that there would be nothing to record as the family members read silently and all read their own books so didn't discuss what had been read. There was no equivalent of the Windsor Park 'visitors book' for recording comments from reading. Children were allowed to read usually what they wanted, without the need to analyse the text, although there were exceptions. Mrs Ling of Windsor Park encouraged the children not to read cartoons and to share their books with her. Some of the religious literacy practices, which all seemed to be for personal enlightenment, were fairly similar to school literacy practices, with reading aloud followed by discussion of the meaning. Those of the readers of the Qur'an, on the other hand, were different in that it was the act of reading aloud in a language that was not well understood by the reader that was valued rather than the meaning. In classrooms it was meaning that was valued, particularly for older children.

Purposes for writing the school context

As with reading, there was a heavy emphasis on learning to write in school and also on writing in order to complete school learning tasks. In the early grades the emphasis was on correct letter formation which seemed to be reinforced in later years with an emphasis on setting out and neatness of work. For instance, at Highglen the Year 2 children were exhorted to *make sure you do nice neat work* and in Year 3 In some classes ruling up the page before beginning writing was emphasised.

Correct spelling was focussed upon in most classrooms, although in Years 1 and 2 children's invented phonetic spelling was often encouraged. Liam Kelly's Year 2 teacher in Countrytown told him: *Don't worry as long as it [spelling] makes sense* and the Year 1 children in the bilingual program at Radcliffe were encouraged to invent their own spellings in English. Nevertheless, Andrew Caravaggio in Year 1 at Highglen was given a spelling test and he had a *Spelling Journal* in which to write the words he needed to learn. These *Spelling Journals*, issued by the State Education Department, were a feature of most classrooms as was partner testing of children's individual words to be learnt. Whole class spelling tests were also observed: Sophie Milardovic in Year 5 at St Andrews was given a spelling test of 50 words in the morning and another spelling test in the afternoon.

In addition to a *Spelling Journal* many children had *Have-a-go* pads in which they were encouraged to attempt spellings of difficult words before writing them and some also had *Top-up* books in which words to be learnt were written before being transferred to

Spelling Journals. Some classes of children were also using other Education Department workbooks such as *Spellit, My Word* and *Patterns* books which, amongst other things, examine the spelling patterns of words.

The importance attached to spelling in the writing process was evident in the environmental print on some classroom walls. At Yabby Creek there were formulae for both learning spellings: *Look, Cover, Write, Check* and for writing: *Edit, Proof read your draft, Check punctuation and spelling.*

A further purpose for writing, apart from learning spelling and practising neatness, was to learn and practise the conventions of certain defined genres. In Hatini George's Year 7 classroom in Countrytown, Mr Roberts drew the children's attention to *Report, Exposition, Narrative, Procedure, Explanation* and *Recount* text forms. The Year 6/7 at Yabby Creek had worked through four of these text types, and the formulae for writing them were evident in many classrooms. Kate Bauman in Year 3 at Redlands was learning how to write a report. She had been required to organise the facts on pelicans that she had collected from books. The children had been required to classify their information in terms of *Description (what it looks like), Dynamics (what it does)* and *Time and Place (when and where).* Kate had placed all her 22 facts into these categories and made an overview of her report which she called a *graphical outline.*

The emphasis on appropriate genre forms had also influenced the daily diary writing which was seen in several classrooms. In the Year 6/7 classroom at Yabby Creek, the children were reminded to establish the *setting* with the formula of *who, when, where, what, why* and to use one paragraph for each event. In some classrooms the children were also practising writing skills using a conference-process approach, in which they were encouraged to write as if they were professional writers, and to use jargon specific to the approach: Patrick Kelly's Year 6/7 class in Countrytown was asked to *conference* each other then start *publishing.*

Daily writing practice, which sometimes took the form of diary writing, was also a feature of many classrooms. In Karen Hooper and Paul Caravaggio's Year 7 class at Highglen, Mrs Painter described Daily Writing as a *First Steps* strategy. To illustrate this strategy she had written some information on a large sheet of paper and invited the children to *fix up* her writing. School writing tasks also took the form of worksheets, copying from the board and cloze exercises, the purposes for which were not always clear to the researchers, nor ,most likely, to the children. In some of these activities the purpose seemed to be to evaluate children's progress.

Many of the writing practices observed in the classrooms were standardised throughout the state by means of workbooks published by the Education Department and by formulae for writing which followed various curriculum documents. In many classrooms being a 'good' writer seemed to involve paying great attention to spelling, punctuation and neatness. The conference-process approach to writing in which children create several drafts of a piece of work was in evidence as were formulae for writing in different genres. Apparently, 'good' writers also mimic professional authors in the drafting, editing and publishing cycle and follow the rules of various genres.

Purposes for writing: the home context

The purposes for writing in the home were much more immediately obvious than those of the school. For parents it was often work-related. Mr Johnson of Yabby Creek kept records of stock and cash flow and Mr Long of Redlands kept the accounts of the school canteen. Some parents like Mrs Kelly and Ms Manders from Countrytown were studying and had to write in order to complete assignments. Families also wrote in order to keep in touch with relatives, especially with those who lived a long distance away, such as the Kuhn family of Radcliffe with relatives in Cambodia, although many, including the Jackson family of Countrytown preferred to use the phone to contact their overseas relatives even if it was more expensive. The families wrote shopping lists, paid bills and some left notes for family members who were not home through work and other commitments: Sally Long of Redlands left a note for her father, *Dad I need some underwear.* On the other hand the highly literate mother in the Smith family of Windsor Park said that she preferred to *talk* to her children.

A few families used writing in ways which were similar to those of the school. The Carroll family wrote journals which were similar to the diary writing which was a feature of many classrooms. Further, the family wrote their goals on cards and read them morning and evening in order to *change habits* and to *achieve anything in life.* The Ling children of Windsor Park were encouraged by their mother to take a note-book to their Presbyterian worship and John Ling regularly wrote in his workbook with his mother. The Wongs, also of Windsor Park, practised their Mandarin by writing secret diaries which could not be read by other children.

Several of the children wrote for enjoyment. Millie Clay of Radcliffe rarely read, and *her spelling is atrocious...yet with pen and paper she spends hours writing.* Kate Bauman of Redlands also spent time writing for enjoyment at home. Nevertheless, as with reading, much of the writing done at home by the children was related to school homework.

In general, of the homes where there was evidence of writing which was not related to school work, there was an emphasis on writing for immediate purposes: to keep in touch with relatives; to write notes to members of the family who were not at home; to keep account of what was available and what needed to be bought; to write for enjoyment. There was some evidence in a few families of personal writing which was similar to the school situation, such as journal writing and goal setting, but this was not widespread. Families preferred to talk or to use the telephone. In this personal writing, there did not seem to be quite the emphasis on spelling, punctuation, neatness and correct use of genre which was apparent in the schools.

Other differences in home and school reading and writing practices

An important difference between the home and school contexts was in the degree of formality of literacy practices. In school, many of the literacy practices were ritualised

routines: newstelling, reciprocal reading, project writing, graphic outlines, literary socio-grams, formal work-book and work-sheet exercises and writing in different genres. Even in Julian Barnes' preprimary class the children had been required to make scrap-books which contained identical items. There were certain prescribed ways for doing such activities. Sometimes these were explained to children during observed lessons as in the lesson in Year 3 at Redlands in which the literary socio-gram was explained. At other times children were expected to know what to do without explanation because they had experienced a particular format several times. The Year 6/7 teacher at Radcliffe did not explain the worksheet that Thy and Bopha were required to complete. They seemed able to follow the form and could complete a word-sleuth that merely needed complete words to be circled, although their level of English was such that they could not cope with the subject matter.

In contrast, in the home, literacy practices were often informal and spontaneous, with the single exception of many activities of the Carroll family which were very close to school activities. Apart from homework and religious practices the children usually chose what, when, and where to read and write.

Another difference between home and school literacy practices was the emphasis in school of having reading and writing activities completed within a given time frame. This was more obvious in some classrooms than in others. In Year 2 at Windsor Park the children were told: *Pads open! Quickly! Only got a few minutes to get this finished!* In one Year 3 lesson at Redlands the children were constantly exhorted to finish quickly:

> MR. J. Anybody getting behind? When I see everyone colouring then I know it's time to go on. Still waiting for a couple of people. And we have run out of time.

The time constraints in Year 6/7 at Yabby Creek were less obvious, but even so, when Naomi Johnson took her time to complete an activity another child commented, *Naomi's still doing that!*

The similarity of classrooms was particularly noticeable in terms of the amount of time spent in literacy related activities. In school a large amount of the time was spent in reading and writing by all children. Most classroom activities involved reading and many involved writing. There was a high degree of literacy activity not only in "Language" lessons but also across the curriculum in social studies, science, health education, home/school communication, and even school camps. In the bilingual program at Radcliffe the activities were similar, regardless of the language used, to those of other early childhood classrooms in the study. The story reading sessions were very similar to that in Julian Barnes' preprimary class at Windsor Park.

In contrast to the uniformity of the classrooms there were vast differences in the homes in terms of the amount of time spent on literacy-related activities and to a lesser extent the types of materials read. Some families spent large amounts of time reading: the females in the Bauman family of Redlands read voraciously, their diet being *Mills and Boon*, *The Babysitters Club*, *Saddle Club* and *Sweet Valley High*. Mrs Smith of

Windsor Park, on the other hand also read voraciously, but drew *the line at Mills and Boon*. Mrs Long of Redlands was also a keen reader, preferring murder mysteries; her son Andrew was reading the *Shenara* fantasy series and a book of lateral thinking puzzles. Thy Kuhn seemed to read only when instructed to do so by his father, who read books on religion, mathematics and philosophy. In many homes there was little non-homework related writing apart from those homes in which there were tertiary students. It could be said that such writing was also homework related. For the children in most homes the writing that they did at school was virtually all of the writing they ever did.

In schools, the teachers planned for literacy experiences and evaluation of the children was built in to many of them. In the home, literacy experiences often arose as part of other activities. Two very similar situations arose when word meanings were discussed. In one, the Year 1 English bilingual teacher at Radcliffe discussed the meaning of the word *inn*:

MRS E: The **inn** was full. What was the **inn**?

CHILD: The place where er Jee er....

MRS E: Stay. Like a hotel place. Right. An **inn**. Do we have an *I* word?....It's a place where sometimes if you travel to another place. Like your Mummy and Daddy when they go to Cambodia like now, they will stay with your grandma and your grandpa...They don't have to pay your grandma and grandpa because your grandma and grandpa share the house with them, but maybe if they had to stay in Thailand and they had no family, no grandma and grandpa, they would have to stay in a hotel. That means they would have to pay the man money so that they could stay in the place.

At home Kate Bauman asked about the meaning of *abuse* at the dinner table:

CARA: We've got another camp coming up next year. To Rottnest Island [(inaudible)

KATE: [Cool.

MR B: Drug abuse.

CARA: Like anti-drugs and anti-alcohol and anti-smoking.

KATE: What does that mean?

MRS B: [Against it

CARA: [Against it.

MR B: They're not against people drinking alcohol. They're against the abuse of alcohol

KATE: What does that mean?

MR B: When people drink too much alcohol and they get drunk and they get drunk and they sometimes get violent [

MRS B: [Drink drive

MR B: Do silly things. Mm...

Whilst the discussion of word meanings appears to be similar in both situations, the school book reading session had been planned by the teacher as part of a theme about

Christmas in order to familiarise the children with the alphabet and it was the teacher who initiated the discussion of word meaning. In the home, it was the child who asked for clarification of word meaning *as part of* a spontaneous dinner table discussion which arose out of the interests of the child's sister. Nevertheless, in both situations the adults took care to explain word meanings and to relate them to contexts which the children would understand.

A key difference between home and school literacy practices related to the public or collective nature of school activities and the often private or individual nature of home activities. Many activities in school involved the whole class group, which could be up to 35 children. Sometimes more than one class was involved. The Cambodian bilingual Year 1 class was the smallest at 12 students and there was some individual work in the pre-primary class at Windsor Park and small group work at Yabby Creek. Frequently, however, the whole class was engaged in exactly the same activity which was often a workbook task or worksheet. At other times the instructions given to the whole class were the same, but groups or individuals chose their own topics *within* a given structure for such activities as projects and flow-charts.

Thus the focus at home was on the individual; literacy activities were spontaneous and usually involved individuals and their interests or small groups of family members, in contrast to the whole-group, planned, timed, and ritualised procedures of the school.

Homework and parental involvement in school-related activities

All the parents in the study, without exception, were interested in their children's literacy progress. Nevertheless, the role which parents took upon themselves in developing their children's literacy varied from family to family. On the one hand Mrs Milardovic of Countrytown had taught her preschool children to read, Mrs Smith of Windsor Park had taught her son John because he hadn't learnt to read in Year 1, and Mrs Long of Redlands was helping Sally who was having difficulty in reading. On the other hand Anne Scott of Radcliffe told how Millie's teacher had expected her to be involved in Millie's reading in Year 1, but she had passed the problem back to the teacher: *I just said to her, "You know you're the one who gets paid to teach her to read between 9.10 and 3.15 and if you can't, then this is your problem, not mine."* Most parents, however, expressed the opinion that they should be involved in their children's literacy development and some expressed concern for those children who did not have such support at home.

One recurrent way in which the parents did support their children was with homework. Although Laurie Binayi of Blue Creek and Jane Caravaggio of Countrytown did not appear to have any set work, for most children homework became an extension of the ritualised procedures of the school day. In the Kuhn and Kha families the ritual was limited to hearing the reading of the Years 1 and 2 children in the bilingual program:

> The father sit down here and tell the children sit close to him and the children read to him and when sometimes children come to word too hard for him children ask him what that word say ...what it means, something like that, then they ask. After they read parent sign.

This hearing of reading was practised in various forms in most of the families which had children in the junior primary years. For the Kuhn and Kha children this seemed to be all the help with homework that they were able to get, and only the fathers could give this as neither mother was literate. The parents were apparently not familiar with the homework requirements for their older children. Therefore, some parents were not always able to give help with homework as they did not understand the subject matter of the assignments. Several parents commented that they could not give help with mathematics as the children grew older. This did not necessarily prevent the children from receiving help. Mrs Ling of Windsor Park told her daughter to make use of the university students who attended their Church and Mrs Milardovic of Countrytown said, *I don't know how to do high school work, but we work it out together.* She demonstrated how this was done when she provided support and scaffolding for Sophie who was preparing an assignment on a book read in class. Mrs Milardovic showed that she had read the book in question: *Soon as I read that page I felt really sad,* offered suggestions, *Well, say something about ...,* and made Sophie reflect on what had already been written, *All right Sophie, what did you write so far? Now read that.* Finally she gave encouragement, *Well that's good.*

In some families the homework sessions were highly routinized and took preference over other activities such as watching television. Mrs Ling of Windsor Park checked John's homework every night; Mr Barnes of also Windsor Park checked Anna's maths homework and wrote her a note to indicate errors; Mrs Carroll of Radcliffe checked Claire's comprehension of her reading, corrected pronunciations and provided word definitions. Further, the writing of school projects was sometimes a task in which parents and older siblings became highly involved. Andrew Long and Kirsty Bauman of Redlands had a great deal of help from other family members in completing their projects.

In many families, the children were expected to do homework independently with little parental supervision, but some checks were usually still kept: Liz O'Leary of Windsor Park had her completed work checked for spelling and her mother had previously arranged for tutoring for her children through the Aboriginal Services program. Donna West of Windsor Park *just comes home and sits down and gets on with it,* but she still has help with her writing assignments.

Homework is clearly the link between the literacy domains of home and school. For many children there was support and guidance at home and homework sessions were an extension of the school day and the time when parents could play a part in school learning. Some parents took advantage of these sessions to become highly involved in structured and almost ritualised learning sessions with their children. Other parents were not able to play a large part personally in this learning, but were able find suitable resources for their children, whilst a minority, who were unable to become highly

involved in this learning, had little knowledge of the specific demands of homework in relation to activities at school.

Story telling

An emphasis on story telling was evident in families who participated in a predominantly oral culture. For the Kuhn family of Radcliffe it was the means by which the culture was passed on to the children. Em told how her mother valued this practice: *Sometimes for our bedtime story they tell us a bedtime story before we go to sleep...my mum said like we grow bigger we have children we pass them on.*

Both Em and her brother Thy told stories of life in Cambodia and Thailand which either they or their parents had experienced. Karen Binayi of Blue Creek told a ghost story. According to his teacher and great grandmother Bessie, 5-year-old Christian Binayi is also a good story teller.

Story telling as a form of cultural expression was evidently highly valued in these two families, although it did not seem to be overtly valued in schools. Nevertheless, the news-telling sessions of many classrooms appeared to contain many of the elements of story telling, albeit in a very structured form and focussed upon content seen to be appropriate for school.

Computer use

All schools owned computers and used them to greater or lesser extent. Yabby Creek and Windsor Park seemed to be particularly well endowed. Most of those at Yabby Creek were Macintosh computers and at Windsor Park there were 10 IBM machines for the Upper Primary students and the older BBC computers had been placed in the Junior Primary part of the school. In all schools some computer use by students was observed, but it was certainly not as frequent as might have been expected. Laurie Binayi of Blue Creek said that he used computers at school and some of Thy Kuhn and Bopha Kha's Year 6/7 class were working on their projects using the computers for word processing. At Yabby Creek and Countrytown schools children were observed playing educational games, whilst at Windsor Park there were formal computer lessons conducted by one of the teachers at the school who has taken on the role of specialising in computer teaching.

Whilst all children had some access to computers at school, this was not true of the home. To some extent, access appeared to be dependent on the financial status of the parents. Most of the families at Windsor Park owned computers, whereas neither Cambodian family in Radcliffe owned one and neither did the Milardovics own one at the beginning of the study although two of the children were already studying at university. Computer ownership was also related to the perceived needs of the families: the Johnson and Hooper families of Yabby Creek had computers which the parents used for keeping records of farm materials and the Long family had bought one

for Andrew in order for him to learn to type and to do homework assignments at high school, which Mr Long also intended to use for the school canteen accounts. The Kelly family of Countrytown did not possess a computer because Mrs Kelly thought that they were *toxic*, although Patrick played games on the school computer.

Occasionally, the use to which the computers were put by the children was related to homework. Andrew Long had word processed an assignment and some of the families at Windsor Park had bought word processing packages for this same purpose. Jake Carroll of Radcliffe used the computer to keep himself occupied on a Sunday by writing his own program to generate a *Scripture Quiz* since the religious practices of the family did not allow him to play games on that day. It seemed, however, when talking to the children that the main use for computers was games. For instance, in spite of their stated reasons for purchasing the computer, Andrew Long and his father spent much of their time with it playing games. This was true for almost all children whose families owned computers. In the Smith family of Windsor Park it was rarely used for anything else and the children had a library of over one hundred games.

Television and Radio

All families owned and used televisions. The number per family varied, but the Scott/Clay/Bayley family of Radcliffe owned four and the Khas also of Radcliffe owned three. In both of these families and some of the others, the children had a television in their own bedrooms and were able to watch it alone with few parental restrictions. For other families television viewing was a family social event. The Ling children of Windsor Park sometimes watched television with their mother and the Binayis of Blue Creek had arranged their mattresses for comfortable viewing. In these homes the television programs formed a basis for discussion. The Binayis discussed a television movie as they watched, translating the text into Kriol.

This discussion of television programs and issues that arose from them was a feature of many homes. Mr Long told how Sally gained knowledge in such discussion: *She used to ask us quite a few things about Home and Away, like why someone's pregnant and she'll say, "Why's she upset and moody like that?" She likes to find out about life.* Mrs Bauman told how her girls *object if somebody doesn't get the right sentence to go to jail or young kids are out driving cars they shouldn't be allowed to.* The West and O'Leary families of Windsor Park also used television as a springboard for family discussion of television programs and issues. Here television was the catalyst for discussion of current affairs in which children were encouraged to have their own opinions and to express them.

In spite of the potential of television to provide the kinds of discussion and analysis of texts which were valued in some classrooms, many parents were wary when talking about TV watching. The Carroll family of Radcliffe had an *uneasy relationship with television* and Mr Carroll was trying to change his viewing behaviour: *What I have to do is change my desire to watch TV so I no longer want to.* Mrs Kelly of Countrytown said: *I don't think it's very healthy. A lot of it is a load of rubbish. They (the*

children) watch the Simpsons which is a real hassle cause we think the values in it are a bit suspect. Mr Caravaggio also of Countrytown expressed his ambivalence towards it with the words: *Now and again I sloth in front of it.*

These and other parents limited the time that children were allowed to view, some of them by ensuring that the children had an early bedtime. For the Barnes family of Windsor Park it was 7 o'clock and for the Lings it was 8. In the Milardovic family of Countrytown even the parents went to bed at 9 o'clock in order to prevent the children from watching television late at night.

In other families the television was on for much of the day and night, beginning for Em Kuhn of Radcliffe at 6 o'clock in the morning with aerobics and cartoons and ending well after 9.30 for Thy when he watched *boring movies.* Regardless of the amount of time they watched television, families watched some similar programs. Popular programs were *Neighbours*, *Home and Away*, *A Country Practice*, *Sale of the Century*, *Sesame Street* and *Playschool* as well as various sport, cartoon and news programs. Whatever their social class, location or cultural background, the families viewed most of these programs.

Other programs were watched by a minority of the families. SBS was watched by some of those who had arrived in Australia from other countries, especially when programs were in their mother tongue or concerned their country of origin. Some of the British migrants had a preference for British made programs. Most of the families owned VCRs and recorded programs to be replayed, sometimes so that they could view them to decide if they were suitable viewing for their children. They also borrowed from the video shops and this was particularly important for some NESB families who were able to borrow videos in their mother tongue.

Although not as popular as television, the radio played a part in the life of certain families. For some it was used as background noise, but for others it was used for specific purposes. For the Waugh family of Yabby Creek the 8 am news signalled that it was time to catch the school bus; for Mr Long of Redlands it was a way of finding out about the Australian way of life when he first arrived in Australia as a migrant. It was very important in the life of the George family of Countrytown as Mr George had to listen to it in order to find out when to return to work. The Jacksons also listened to this local radio station as it sometimes played requests for Malaysian music.

For certain participants in the study, using the radio was a powerful means of subverting the system to obtain goods or power. When Coles were offering Macintosh computers to schools in exchange for their dockets the children of Yabby Creek wrote to radio stations in Perth complaining that their nearest Coles store was 150 km away. As a result they received an enormous number of dockets from listeners all over the state which they exchanged for 9 Macintoshes. Similarly Mr Bauman of Redlands had contacted talk-back radio in order to get a cross walk moved. He explained:

> Generally it's when I've used up every other facility to get something done. You know, then I go to talk-back radio and see if you can get something done through them...

> Once you get a voice on radio it works I would say 99% of the time because all these talk-back programs are monitored by politicians, not so much the politicians themselves, but by their staff, and they don't like bad publicity on the radio, so yes, most of the time you get a lot of success.

In contrast to the homes, there was surprisingly little use of radio and television in schools, although there were several instances of the use of videos and audio-tapes. Television did sometimes form *a basis* for discussion at school and the Year 6/7 class in Countrytown was acting out *Sale of the Century* for an assembly item.

There were large differences between the families in their attitudes to television, the social context of viewing, the amount of discussion around what had been viewed and the amount of viewing done. Both television and radio to a certain extent, and videos in particular, allowed families of different cultural backgrounds to have contact with their culture and their mother tongue.

Success in literacy: What are the influences?

It has been shown that there was much similarity between the school literacy experiences of the children in the study. Children spent much of their school time in reading and writing activities many of which shared similarities which were influenced by Education Department curriculum documents. In the schools all children had access to the resources of books and computers. In the schools there was also a good deal of discussion around text which Heath (1991) asserts as being important for literacy:

> It has been the continued learning and creation of opportunities to expand with others what one has read through talk, action and reflection that has formed the core of the sense of being literate since the classical era of Greek civilisation. (p.22)

In the children's homes, on the other hand, there was a wide variation in the type and frequency of reading and writing activities as well as in the resources for literacy available to children and in the amount of discussion which went on around text. The question thus arises as to which of these differences may be important to school success.

There was no formal testing of the children in the study to ascertain their levels of school achievement so that school success could not be judged objectively. Further, most of the children were of primary school age so that success could only be judged at a particular point in time, which was far from the end of the children's school careers. Still, it was apparent through discussion with parents and teachers and observations in the classrooms that many of the children were achieving at average, or above average levels of literacy. Several had been selected for special programs for gifted children. For those children who were operating successfully, certain combinations of variables seemed to be present.

Whilst all of the parents were concerned for their children's futures, some were investing time and energy in planning for this through support for their children's

career aspirations and school selection. At Windsor Park the parents were identifying which high schools their children should attend, whether public or private. Andrew Long's father of Redlands had also chosen his high school carefully and one of the Carroll children of Radcliffe had been sent to a different school from his siblings. The parents of many of the children either monitored homework to a greater or lesser extent, or encouraged them to find alternative resources and were aware of their children's level of achievement. Guthrie and Greaney (1991) have identified the following home variables as being associated with literacy: parent-child verbal interaction, including reading to the child; early experience with books; structured life-styles with rules regarding television watching and expected bedtimes; parents' reading; access to reading materials; and opportunities to read. All of these conditions were evident in some of the homes studied and most were evident in all but a few. So what, if anything, appeared to differentiate the environments of those children who may be successful in the school context from those who may be less so?

One of the children who was experiencing some difficulties in school work was in the same home environment, containing most of the variables outlined above, as her brother who was achieving at a very high level. At the beginning of the school year her teacher had discussed the problems with her parents and, as a result, her mother was giving her extra help with reading and writing homework. By the end of the school year her teacher commented that she was then making much better progress. It seems then that through intervention by *both* the teacher and parents her difficulties were being remediated to a certain extent.

For two other children who were also having some difficulties some of the variables associated with progress in literacy were present in their homes. Nevertheless for one, life was not ordered as it was for many of the other children. Although the family apparently had rules about television watching this child revealed that he watched a lot of television. His parents were not particularly concerned about future careers, suggesting that the children might not need to work. The other child also watched a good deal of television as she had one in her room, in spite of her mother's views about what was suitable viewing. Her mother saw the child's literacy problems as the teacher's responsibility and preferred to tell the child answers to homework questions she was herself supposed to look up in reference books.

Some of the children who came from backgrounds where the parents' English was limited seemed also to be experiencing difficulty in meeting the literacy demands of the school. Their parents were unable to help with homework or fully appreciate the requirements of the school curriculum. Nevertheless, in the case of the bilingual program, the school had adapted to some of the needs of the children, thereby bridging the gap between home and school while developing the children's mother tongue. This program was still in the early stages, but the children's literacy seemed to be progressing well in both languages.

It seems that literacy practices are deeply embedded in the social and procedural fabric of schools and homes and that school success in literacy is dependent upon a complex *combination* of home and school variables which may vary from child to child. For

many of the families in the study the literacy practices of the home complemented and *extended* those of the school and their children were coping well with the latter's literacy demands. For others, the literacy practices of the home were not such a good match with those of the school, yet some of these children were also coping, perhaps because the school was providing opportunities for reading and especially for writing which were not available at home.

But since literacy is integrated with broader familial purposes and values and not merely the actual practices, other variables, such as the degree and kind of parental involvement in their children's education and the attitude of parents to their children's upbringing and futures also seemed to play a role in literacy development. The progress of the children in the bilingual programs suggests, that where educational resources are used to value and extend the culture of the home, children may achieve levels of literacy which would not otherwise have been expected.

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